CURLY

ROGER POCOCK

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CURLY

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TALES OF WESTERN LIFE
THE RULES OF THE GAME
THE ARCTIC NIGHT
THE BLACKGUARD
ROTTENNESS
THE DRAGON SLAYER
A FRONTIERSMAN

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"GRABBING HER HEAD HE THREW HER FALLING BODY CLEAR"

Frontispiece

CURLY

A TALE OF THE ARIZONA DESERT

BY

ROGER POCOCK

AUTHOR OF "A FRONTIERSMAN," ETC.

LONDON

GAY AND BIRD

22, BEDFORD STREET, STRAND

1904

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CURLY

CHAPTER I

APACHES

BACK in Old Texas, 'twixt supper and sleep time, the boys in camp would set around the fire and tell lies. They talked about the Ocean which was bigger than all the plains, and I began to feel worried because I'd never seen what the world was like beyond the far edge of the grass. Life was a failure until I could get to that Ocean to smell and see for myself. After that I would be able to tell lies about it when I got back home again to the cow-camps. When I was old enough to grow a little small fur on my upper lip I loaded my pack pony, saddled my horse, and hit the trail, butting along day after day towards the sunset, expecting every time I climbed a ridge of hills to see the end of the yellow grass and the whole Pacific Ocean shining beyond, with big ships riding herd like cowboys around the grazing whales.

One morning, somewheres near the edge of

Arizona, I noticed my horse throw his ears to a small sound away in the silence to the left. It seemed to be the voice of a rifle, and maybe some hunter was missing a deer in the distance, so I pointed that way to inquire. After a mile or so I heard the rifle speaking again, and three guns answered, sputtering quick and excited. That sounded mighty like a disagreement, so I concluded I ought to be cautious and roll my tail at once for foreign parts. I went on slow, approaching a small hill. Again a rifle-shot rang out from just beyond the hill, and two shots answered—muzzle-loading guns. At the same time the wind blew fresh from the hill, with a whiff of powder, and something else which made my horses shy. "Heap bad smell!" they snuffed. "Just look at that!" they signalled with their ears. "Ugh!" they snorted.

"Get up!" said I; and charged the slope of the hill.

Near the top I told them to be good or I'd treat them worse than a tiger. Then I went on afoot with my rifle, crept up to the brow of the hill, and looked over through a clump of cactus.

At the foot of the hill, two hundred feet below me, there was standing water—a muddy pool perhaps half an acre wide—and just beyond that on the plain a burned-out camp fire beside a couple of canvas-covered waggons. It looked as if the white men there had just been pulling out of camp, with their teams all harnessed for the trail, for the horses lay

some dead, some wounded, mixed up in a struggling heap. As I watched, a rifle-shot rang out from the waggons, aimed at the hillside, but when I looked right down I could see nothing but loose rocks scattered below the slope. After I watched a moment a brown rock moved; I caught the shine of an Indian's hide, the gleam of a gun-barrel. Close by was another Indian painted for war, and beyond him a third lying dead. So I counted from rock to rock until I made out sixteen of the worst kind of Indians—Apaches—all edging away from cover to cover to the left, while out of the waggons two rifles talked whenever they saw something to hit. One rifle was slow and cool, the other scared and panicky, but neither was getting much meat.

For a time I reckoned, sizing up the whole proposition. While the Apaches down below attacked the waggons, their sentry up here on the hill had forgotten to keep a look-out, being too much interested. He'd never turned until he heard my horses clattering up the rocks, but then he had yelled a warning to his crowd and bolted. One Indian had tried to climb the hill against me and been killed from the waggons, so now the rest were scared of being shot from above before they could reach their ponies. They were sneaking off to the left in search of them. Off a hundred yards to the left was the sentry, a boy with a bow and arrows, running for all he was worth across the plain. A hundred yards beyond him,

down a hollow, was a mounted Indian coming up with a bunch of ponies. If the main body of the Apaches got to their ponies, they could surround the hill, charge, and gather in my scalp. I did not want them to take so much trouble with me.

Of course, my first move was to up and bolt along the ridge to the left until I gained the shoulder of the hill. There I took cover, and said, "Abide with me, and keep me cool, if You please!" while I sighted, took a steady bead, and let fly at the mounted Indian. At my third shot he came down flop on his pony's neck, and that was my first meat. The bunch of ponies smelt his blood and stampeded promiscuous.

The Apaches, being left afoot, couldn't attack me none. If they tried to stampede they would be shot from the waggons, while I hovered above their line of retreat considerably; and if they stayed I could add up their scalps like a sum in arithmetic. They were plumb surprised at me, and some discouraged, for they knew they were going to have disagreeable times. Their chief rose up to howl, and a shot from the waggons lifted him clean off his feet. It was getting very awkward for those poor barbarians, and one of them hoisted a rag on his gun by way of surrender.

Surrender? This Indian play was robbery and murder, and not the honest game of war. The man who happens imprudent into his own bear-trap is

not going to get much solace by claiming to be a warrior and putting up white flags. The game was bear-traps, and those Apaches had got to play bear-traps now, whether they liked it or not. There were only two white folks left in the waggons, and one on the hill, so what use had we for a dozen prisoners who would lie low till we gave them a chance, then murder us prompt. The man who reared up with the peace flag got a shot from the waggons which gave him peace eternal.

Then I closed down with my rifle, taking the Indians by turns as they tried to bolt, while the quiet gun in the waggon camp arrested fugitives and the scary marksman splashed lead at the hill most generous. Out of sixteen Apaches two and the boy got away intact, three damaged, and the rest were gathered to their fathers.

When it was all over I felt unusual solemn, running my paw slow over my head to make sure I still had my scalp; then collected my two ponies and rode around to the camp. There I ranged up with a yell, lifting my hand to make the sign of peace, and a man came limping out from the waggons. He carried his rifle, and led a yearling son by the paw.

The man was tall, clean-built, and of good stock for certain, but his clothes were in the *lo-and-behold* style —a pane of glass on the off eye, stand-up collar, spotty necktie, boiled shirt, riding-breeches with puffed sleeves most amazing, and the legs of his

boots stiff like a brace of stove-pipes. His near leg was all bloody and tied up with a tourniquet bandage. As to his boy Jim, that was just the quaintest thing in the way of pups I ever saw loose on the stock range. He was knee-high to a dawg, but trailed his gun like a man, and looked as wide awake as a little fox. I wondered if I could tame him for a pet.

"How d'ye do?" squeaked the pup, as I stepped down from the saddle.

I allowed I was feeling good.

"I'm sure," said the man, "that we're obliged to you and your friends on the hill. In fact, very much obliged."

Back in Texas I'd seen water go to sleep with the cold, but this man was cool enough to freeze a boiler.

"Will you—er—ask your friends," he drawled, "to come down? I'd like to thank them."

"I'll pass the glad word," said I. "My friends is in Texas."

"My deah fellow, you don't—aw—mean to say you were alone?"

"Injuns can shoot," said I, "but they cayn't hit."

"Two of my men are dead and the third is dying. I defer to your—er—experience, but I thought they could—er—hit."

Then I began to reckon I'd been some hazardous in my actions. It made me sweat to think.

"Well," said I, to be civil, "I cal'late I'd best introduce myself to you-all. My name's Davies."

"I TOOK HIS PAW"

"I'm Lord Balshannon," said he, mighty polite.

"And I'm the Honourable Jim du Chesnay," squeaked the kid.

I took his paw and said I was proud to know a warrior with such heap big names. The man laughed.

"Wall, Mister Balshannon," says I, "your horses is remnants, and the near fore wheel of that waggon is sprung to bust, and them Apaches has chipped your laig, which it's broke out bleeding again, so I reckon——"

"You have an eye for detail," he says, laughing; "but if you will excuse me now, I'm rather busy."

He looked into my eyes cool and smiling, asking for no help, ready to rely on himself if I wanted to go. A lump came into my throat, for I sure loved that man from the beginning.

"Mr. Balshannon," says I, "put this kid on top of a waggon to watch for Indians, while you dress that wound. I'm off."

He turned his back on me and walked away.

"I'll be back," said I, busy unloading my pack-horse. "I'll be back," I called after him, "when I bring help!"

At that he swung sudden and came up against me. "Er—thanks," he said, and grabbed my paw. "I'm awfully obliged, don't you know."

I swung to my saddle and loped off for help.

CHAPTER II

LORD BALSHANNON

WITH all the signs and the signal smokes pointing for war, I reckoned I could dispense with that Ocean and stay round to see the play. Moreover, there was this British lord, lost in the desert, wounded some, helpless as a baby, game as a grizzly bear, ringed round with dead horses and dead Apaches, and his troubles appealed to me plentiful. I scouted around until I hit a live trail, then streaked away to find people. I was doubtful if I had done right in case that lord got massacred, me being absent, so I rode hard, and at noon saw the smoke of a camp against the Tres Hermanos Mountains. It proved to be a cow camp with all the boys at dinner.

They had heard nothing of Apaches out on the war trail, but when I told what I knew, they came glad on the dead run, their waggons and pony herd following. We found the Britisher digging graves for three dead men, and looking apt to require a fourth for his own use.

"Er—good evening," says he, and I began to

wonder why I'd sweated myself so hot to rescue an iceberg.

"Gentlemen," say he to the boys, "you'll find some er—coffee ready beside the fire, and afterwards, if you please, we will bury my dead."

The boys leaned over in their saddles, wondering at him, but the lord's cool eye looked from face to face, and we had to do what he said. He was surely a great chief, that Lord Balshannon.

The men who had fallen a prey to the Apaches were two teamsters and a Mexican, all known to these Bar Y riders, and they were sure sorry. But more than that they enjoyed this shorthorn, this tenderfoot from the east who could stand off an outfit of hostile Indians with his lone rifle. They saw he was wounded, yet he dug graves for his dead, made coffee for the living, and thought of everything except himself. After coffee we lined up by the graves to watch the bluff he made at funeral honours. Lord Balshannon was a colonel in the British Army, and he stood like an officer on parade reading from a book. His black hair was touched silver, his face was strong, hard, manful, and his voice quivered while he read from the little book—

> "For I am a stranger with Thee,
> And a sojourner as all my fathers were:
> O spare me a little, that I may recover my strength
> Before I go hence, and am no more seen."

I reckon that there were some of us sniffing as

though we had just caught a cold, while we listened to that man's voice, and saw the loneliness of him. Afterwards Dick Bryant, the Bar Y foreman, walked straight up to Balshannon.

"Britisher," said he, "you may be a sojourner, and we hopes you are, a whole lot, but there's no need to be a stranger. Shake."

So they shook hands, and that was the beginning of a big friendship. Then Balshannon turned to the crowd, and looked slowly from face to face of us.

"Gentlemen," he said kind of feeble, and we saw his face go grey while he spoke, "I'm much obliged to you all for er—for coming. It seems, indeed, ah —that my little son Jim and I have made friends and er—neighbours. I'm sorry that you should find my camp in such aw—in such a beastly mess, but there's some fairly decent whisky in this nearest waggon, and er—" the man was reeling, and his eyes seemed blind, "when we get to my new ranche at Holy Cross I—I hope you'll—friends—aw—and——"

And he dropped in a dead faint.

So long as I stay alive I shall remember that night, the smell of the dead horses, the silence, the smoke of our fire going up straight to a white sky of stars, the Bar Y people in pairs lying wrapped in their blankets around the waggons, the reliefs of riders going out on guard, the cold towards dawn. The little boy Jim had curled up beside me because

he felt lonesome in the waggon. Balshannon lay by the fire, his mind straying away off beyond our range. Often he muttered, but I could not catch the words, and sometimes said something aloud which sounded like nonsense. It must have been midnight, when all of a sudden he sat bolt upright, calling out loud enough to waken half the camp—

"Ryan!" he shouted, "don't disturb him, Ryan! He's upstairs dying. If you fire, the shock will—Ryan! Don't shoot! Ryan!"

Then with a groan he fell back. I moistened his lips with cold tea. "All right," he whispered, "thanks, Helen."

For a long time he lay muttering while I held his hands. "You see, Helen," he whispered, "neither you nor the child could be safe in Ireland. Ryan killed my father."

He seemed to fall asleep after that, and, counting by the stars, an hour went by. Then he looked straight at me—

"You see, dear? I turned them out of their farms, and Ryan wants his revenge, so——"

Towards morning I put some sticks on the fire which crackled a lot. "Go easy, Jim," I heard him say, "don't waste our cartridges. Poor little chap!"

Day broke at last, the cook was astir, and the men rode in from herd. I dropped off to sleep.

It was noon before the heat awakened me, and I sat up to find the fire still burning, but Lord Bal-

shannon gone. I saw his waggons trailing off across the desert. Dick Bryant was at the fire lighting his pipe with a coal.

"Wall," said he, "you've been letting out enough sleep through yo' nose to run an engine. Goin' to make this yo' home?"

"The camp's moved?"

"Sure. I've sent the Britisher's waggons down to Holy Cross. He bought the place from a Mexican last month."

"Is it far?"

"About twenty mile. I've been down there this morning. I reckon the people there had smelt Apaches and run. It was empty, and that's why I'm making this talk to you. I cayn't spare my men after to-day, and I don't calculate to leave a sick man and a lil' boy thar alone."

"I'll stay with them," said I.

"That's good talk. If you-all need help by day make a big smoke on the roof, or if it's night just make a flare of fire. I'll keep my outfit near enough to see."

"You reckon there'll be Indians?"

"None. That was a stray band, and what's left of it ain't feeling good enough to want scalps. But when I got to Holy Cross this morning I seen this paper, and some tracks of the man who left it nailed on the door. I said nothing to my boys, and the Britisher has worries enough already to keep him

interested, but you ought to know what's coming, in case of trouble. Here's the paper.

"'TOMBSTONE, ARIZONA,

"'*3rd February*, 1886.

"'MY LORD,

"'This is to tell you that in spite of everything you could do to destroy me, I'm safe in this free country, and doing well. I've heard of the horrible crime you committed in driving the poor people from your estate in Ireland, from homes which we and our fathers have loved for a thousand years. Now I call the holy saints to witness that I will do to you as you have done to me, and to my people. The time will come when, driven from this your new home, without a roof to cover you, or a crust to eat, your wife and boy turned out to die in the desert, you will plead for even so much as a drink, and it will be thrown in your face. I shall not die until I have seen the end of your accursed house.

"'(Sd.) GEORGE RYAN.'

"These Britishers," said Bryant, "is mostly of two breeds—the lords and the flunkeys; and you kin judge them by the ways they act. This Mr. Balshannon is a lord, and thish yer Ryan's a flunk. If a real man feels that his enemy is some superfluous on this earth, he don't make lamentations and post 'em up on a door. No, he tracks his enemy to a meeting; he makes his declaration of war, and when the other gentleman is good and ready, they lets loose with their guns in battle. This Ryan here has

the morals of a snake and the right hand of a coward."

"Do I give this paper," said I, "to Mr. Balshannon?"

"It's his business, lad, not ours. But until this lord is well enough to fight, you stands on guard."

CHAPTER III

HOLY CROSS

EDITOR'S NOTE.—The walls of Holy Cross rise stark from the top of a hill on the naked desert; and in all the enormous length and breadth of this old fortress there is no door or window to invite attack. At each of the four corners stands a bastion tower to command the flanks, and in the north wall low towers defend the entrance, which is a tunnel through the buildings, barred by massive doors, and commanded by loopholes for riflemen. The house is built of sun-dried bricks, the ceilings of heavy beams supporting a flat roof of earth.

As one enters the first courtyard one sees that the buildings on the right are divided up into a number of little houses for the riders and their families; in front is the gate of the stable court, on the left are the chapel and the dining-hall, and in the middle of the square there is a well. Through the dining-hall on the left one enters the little court with its pool covered with water-lilies, shaded by palm trees, and surrounded by an arcade which is covered by creeping plants, ablaze with flowers. The private rooms open upon this cloister, big, cool, and dark, forming a little palace within the fortress walls. Such is the old Hacienda Santa Cruz which Lord Balshannon had bought from El Señor Don Luis Barrios.

FROM the beginning I saw no sign and smelt no whiff of danger either of Apaches or of Mr. Ryan. When Balshannon was able to ride I

gave him Ryan's letter, watched him read it quietly, but got nary word from him. He looked up from the letter, smiling at my glum face.

"Chalkeye," said he, "couldn't we snare a rabbit for Jim to play with?" He and the kid and me used to play together like babies, and Jim was surely serious with us men for being too young.

In those days Balshannon took advice from Bryant, our nearest neighbour, whose ranche was only one day's ride from Holy Cross. Dick helped him to buy good cattle to stock our range, and two thoroughbred English bulls to improve the breed. Then he bought ponies, and hired Mexican riders. So I began to tell my boss and his little son about cows and ponies—the range-riding, driving, and holding of stock; the roping, branding, and cutting out; how to judge grass, to find water, to track, scout, and get meat for the camp. The boss was too old and set in his ways to learn new play, but Jim had his heart in the business from the first, growing up to cow-punching as though he were born on the range.

Besides that I had to learn them both the natural history of us cowboys, the which is surprising to strangers, and some prickly. Being thoroughbred stock, this British lord and his son didn't need to put on side, or make themselves out to be better than common folks like me.

After the first year, when things were settled down

and the weather cool, Lady Balshannon came to Holy Cross, and lived in the garden court under the palm trees. She was a poor invalid lady, enjoying very bad health, specially when we had visitors or any noise in the house. She never could stand up straight against the heat of the desert. On the range I was teacher to Jim; but in the house this lady made the kid and me come to school for education. We used to race neck and neck over our sums and grammar of an evening. I guess I was the most willing, but the kid had much the best brains. He beat me anyways.

Sometimes I got restless, sniffing up wind for trouble, riding around crazy all night because I was too peaceful and dull to need any sleep. But then the boss wanted me in his business, the lady needed me for lessons and to do odd jobs, the kid needed me to play with and to teach him the life of the stock range; so when I got "Pacific Ocean fever" they all made such a howl that I had to stay. Stopping at Holy Cross grew from a taste into a habit, and you only know the strength of a habit when you try to kill it. That family had a string round my hind leg which ain't broken yet.

The boss made me foreman over his Mexican cowboys, and mayor-domo in charge of Holy Cross. In the house I was treated like a son, with my own quarters, servants, and horses, and my wages were paid to me in ponies until there were three hundred

head marked with my private brand. Some people with bad hearts and forked tongues have claimed that I stole these horses over in Mexico. I treat such with dignified silence and make no comment except to remark that they are liars. Anyway, as the years rolled on, and the business grew, Mr. Chalkeye Davies became a big chief on the range in Arizona.

When the kid was fourteen years old he quit working cows with me, and went to college. Balshannon missed him some, for he took to straying then, and would go off in the fall of the year for a bear-hunt, in the winter to stay with friends, and the rest of the time would hang around the city of Tombstone. I reckon the desert air made him thirsty, because he drank more than was wise, and the need for excitement set him playing cards, so that he lost a pile of money bucking against the faro game and monte. He left me in charge of his business, to round up his calves for branding, and his beef for sale, to keep the accounts, to pay myself and my riders, and ride guard for his lady while she prayed for his soul, alone at Holy Cross. When Jim wanted money at college he wrote to me. In all that time we were not attacked by Indians, Ryans, or any other vermin.

Upon the level roof of Holy Cross there was space enough to handle cavalry, and a wide outlook across the desert. There we had lie-down chairs, rugs, and cushions; and after dinner, when the day's work was done, we would set watching the sunset,

the red afterglow, the arch of night come up in the east, the big stars wheeling slowly until it was sleep-time. But when the boy was at college, and the boss away from home, there was only Lady Balshannon and me to share the long evenings.

"Billy," she said once, for she never would call me Chalkeye, "Billy, do you know that I'm dying?"

"Yes, mum, and me too, but I don't reckon to swim a river till I reach the brink."

"My feet are in the waters, Billy, now."

"I wouldn't hurry, mum. It may be heaven beyond, or it may be—disappointing."

"You dear boy," she laughed; "I want to tell you a story."

I lit a cigarette, and lay down at the rugs at her feet. "I can bear it, mum."

She lay back in her chair, brushing off the warm with her fan.

"Did my husband ever tell you about a man named Ryan?"

"Not to me—no."

"Well, the Ryans were tenant farmers on the Balshannon Estate, at home in Ireland. They were well-to-do yeomen, almost gentlefolk, and George Ryan and my husband were at school together. They might have been friends to-day, but for the terrible Land League troubles, which set the tenants against their landlords. It was a sort of smouldering war between the poor folk and our unhappy Irish

gentry. It's not for me to judge; both sides were more or less in the wrong; both suffered, the landlords ruined, the tenants driven into exile. It's all too sad to talk about.

"My husband's regiment was in India then; my son was born there. Rex used to get letters from poor Lord Balshannon, his father, who was all alone at Balshannon, reduced to dreadful poverty, trying to do his duty as a magistrate, while the wretched peasants had to be driven from their homes. His barns were burnt, twice the house was set on fire, his cattle and horses were mutilated in the fields, and he never went out without expecting to be shot from behind a hedge. He needed help, and at last my husband couldn't bear it any longer. He sent in his papers, left the profession he loved, and went back to Ireland. He was so impatient to see all his old friends that he wired Mr. George Ryan to meet the train at Blandon, and drive with him up to Balshannon House for dinner. Nobody else was told that Colonel du Chesnay was coming. Would you believe it, Billy, those Land Leaguers tore up the track near Blandon Station, pointing the broken rails out over the river! Mr. Ryan was their leader, who knew that my husband was in the train. Nobody else knew. No, mercifully the train wasn't wrecked. The driver pulled up just in time, and my husband left the train then, and walked up through Balshannon Park to the house. He found his father ill

in bed; something wrong with the heart, and sat nursing him until nearly midnight, when the old man fell asleep. After that he crept down very quietly to the dining-room. He found cheese and biscuits, and went off in search of some ale. When he came back he found Mr. Ryan in the dining-room.

"The man was drenched to the skin, and scratched from breaking through hedges. He said that the police were after him with a warrant on the charge of attempted train-wrecking. He swore that he was innocent, that he had come to appeal to Lord Balshannon against what he described as a police conspiracy. Rex told him that the old man was too ill to be disturbed, that the least shock might be fatal. 'Surrender to me,' said Rex, 'and if the police have been guilty of foul play, I'll see that you get full justice.'

"At that moment they heard footsteps outside on the gravel, and peeping out through the window, Mr. Ryan found that the police had surrounded the building. He charged Rex with setting a trap to catch him: he pointed a pistol in my husband's face. 'Don't fire!' said Rex, 'my father is upstairs very ill, and if you fire the shock may be fatal. Don't fire!'

"Mr. Ryan fired.

"The bullet grazed my husband's head, and knocked him senseless. When he recovered he found that Ryan had escaped—nobody knows how,

and a sergeant of the Royal Irish Constabulary told him that the police were in hot pursuit. He heard shots fired in the distance, and that made him frightened for his father. He rushed out of the room, and half-way up the staircase found the old man lying dead. The shock had killed him."

"Lady," I said, "if I were the boss, I'd shoot up that Ryan man into small scraps."

"Billy, you've got to save my husband from being a murderer."

"Ryan," said I, "ain't eligible for the grave until he meets up with Balshannon's gun."

"Promise me to save my husband from this crime."

"But I cayn't promise to shoot up this Ryan myself. He's Balshannon's meat, not mine."

"You must dissuade my husband."

"I'll dissuade none between a man and his kill."

"Oh, what shall I do!" she cried.

"Is your son safe," I asked, "while Ryan lives?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Didn't your man drive all the people off the Balshannon range, and make it a desert?"

"Alas! may he be forgiven!"

"Will Ryan forgive? Is your son safe?"

I sat dead quiet while the lady cried. When a woman stampedes that way you can't point her off her course, or she'd mill round into hysterics; you can't head her back, for she'd dry up hostile; so it's

best to let her have her head and run. When she's tired running she'll quit peaceful.

I lit a cigarette and began to round up all the facts in sight, then to cut the ones I wanted, and let the rest of the herd adrift.

When our Balshannon outfit first camped down in Holy Cross, this Ryan began to accumulate with his family in the nearest city—this being Tombstone—one hundred miles west. Tombstone was new then ; a yearling of a city, but built on silver, and undercut with mines. Ryan took Chance by the tail and held on, starting a livery stable, then a big hotel, while he dealt in mines and helped poor prospectors to find wealth. So Ryan bogged down in riches, the leading man at Tombstone, with daughters in society, and two sons at college. Only this Ryan was shy of meeting up with Lord Balshannon, and I took notice year after year that when my boss went to the city Mr. Ryan happened away on business. Someone was warning Ryan.

"Lady," said I, so sudden that she forgot to go on crying. "You've warned Ryan again and again."

"How do you know that, Billy?"

"It's a hundred-mile ride to Tombstone, but it's only sixty to Lordsburgh on the railroad. Every time the boss goes to Tombstone you send off a rider swift to Lordsburgh. He telegraphs from there to Tombstone."

"Messages to my husband."

"And warnings to Ryan!"

She was struck silent.

"You're saving up Ryan until he gets the chance —to strike."

"Oh, how can you say such things! Besides, Mr. Ryan's afraid, that's why he runs away."

"Ryan ain't playing no common bluff with guns. The game he plays ain't killing. He wants you—all alive—like a cat wants mice; I don't know how, I don't know when—but here are the words he nailed on to the door of this house before Lord Balshannon came:—

> "'The time will come when, driven from your home, without a roof to cover you or a crust to eat, your wife and boy turned out to die in the desert, you——'"

"Stop! Stop!" she screamed.

"Promise me, lady, that you'll send no more messages to Ryan."

"It's murder!"

"No, lady, this is a man's game, called war!"

"I promise," she whispered, "I'll send no more warnings."

CHAPTER IV

THE RANGE WOLVES

THAT same winter Lord Balshannon came down from Lordsburgh on the railroad, by way of Bryant's ranche, and tracked my round-up outfit to our camp at Laguna. That was the spot where the patrone and I fought the Apache raiders, but since then we had built corrals beside the pool, the ring-fences which are used for handling livestock. I had twenty Mexican *vaqueros* with me, branding calves; and the patrone found us all at supper.

While we ate he told me the news—how Dick Bryant was elected Sheriff of the county; how Mr. Ryan's eldest son had left college and gone into business in New York; how three bad men had been lynched by the Vigilance Committee at Tombstone; and how Low-Lived Joe had shot up two Mexicans for being too obstreperous at cards. The boss had always some gossip for me at tea-time.

After supper he passed me a cigar. "Chalkeye," said he, "give these boys as much sleep as you can. At midnight you pull out of camp for Wolf Gap; strike in there at the first streak of dawn, gather the whole of our horses, then run them as hard as

you can to Holy Cross, and throw them into the house."

"Indians?" I asked.

"No, horse rustlers. Bryant gave me the office that some outlaws have come down from Utah. They've heard of our half-bred ponies, and they're in need of remounts."

"We've only two days' forage at the house."

"After to-morrow let the herd into the home pasture under a strong guard by day. Throw them into the house every night, and post a relief of sentries on the roof. We mustn't—haw, allow the poor robbers to fall into temptation, so see that the men have—er plenty of ammunition."

"These robbers may round up our cattle."

"If they do they will have to drive slow, and Bryant will hold the railway-line in force, with troops if necessary, er—Chalkeye!"

"Yessir."

"A friend of mine has turned this gang loose on my stock. There's been crooked work."

"Ryan work, sir?"

"What makes you think that?"

"The birds. I want leave to go shoot Ryan."

"Indeed, ah! I've promised my wife not to—er shoot Mr. Ryan." He stood up and grabbed my paw. "Chalkeye, we must try to behave like—er Christians, for her sake. Now I must be off. You'll find me at Holy Cross."

At noon next day I brought our herd to Holy Cross, and watered all the horses at the dam below the house. This dam crossed a small hollow holding some two or three acres of water, directly under the western wall of the Hacienda. Some old trees sheltered the water, and one of these had been blown down by a gust of wind. As I drove the *remuda* to the gates, one of the mares got snarled up in the wrecked tree, broke her leg, and had to be shot. Then I threw the herd into the stable-court, and went to my quarters.

I reckon that I had been thirty-four hours in the saddle, and used up five horses, so I wanted much to get my eye down for a little sleep. While the *peon* pulled off my boots I gave orders mixed with yawns to my segundo.

"Take charge, Teniente, and report my obedience to El Señor Don Rex. Post a guard of four in the gate-house, close the gates, and place a relief of sentries on the North-west Bastion. If the sentry sees anybody coming, the guard is to call me at once. See that my riders get sleep till sundown, then send a couple of them to haul that dead mare from the water-hole."

I had not slept an hour when a man from the guard-house came running to wake me up. I jumped into my boots, grabbed my gun, and bolted to the gates, where Balshannon joined me at the spy-hole.

"Who's coming?" he asked.

"A white man, patrone, and a boy, on the dead run."

"Message from Bryant, eh? Let them in."

I swung the gates wide open, and we stood watching the riders—a middle-aged stockman and a young cowboy, burning the trail from the north. As they came surging up the approach I reckon their horses smelt a whiff of blood from that dead mare beside the water-hole. Horses go crazy at the smell of blood, and though the man held straight on at a plunging run for the gates, the boy lacked strength to control his mare. When she swerved he spurred, then she began to sunfish, throwing one shoulder to the ground, and then the other, while she bucked. At this the youngster lost his nerve and tried to dismount, the same being the shortest way to heaven, for when the mare felt his weight come on one stirrup she made a side spring, leaving him in the air, then bolted, dragging him by the foot while she kicked the meat from his bones. He was surely booked right through to glory but for Balshannon. My boss was a quick shooter and accurate, so that his first bullet caught the mare full between the eyes, and dropped her dead in her tracks. I raised the long yell for my men, as we rushed to get the boy from under her body.

It seemed to me at the time that the elder man never reined, but made a clear spring from his galloping horse to the ground, reaching the mare with a single jump before she had time to drop.

Grabbing her head, he swung his full weight, and threw her falling body clear of the boy. When we reached the spot he was kneeling beside him in the sand.

"Stunned," he said, "that's all! Seh," he looked up at the patrone, and I saw the tears were starting from his eyes. "Seh, you've saved my son's life with that shot, I reckon"—his voice broke with a sob—"you've sure made me yo' friend."

"Nothing broken, I hope?" said Balshannon.

"No, seh. The stirrup seems to have twisted this foot."

I sent some men for a ground sheet in which the boy could be carried without pain. Balshannon sent for brandy.

Still kneeling beside his son, the stranger looked up into the patrone's face.

"You are Lord Balshannon?" he asked.

"At your service, my good fellow—well?"

"Do any of yo' greasers speak our language?"

"I fancy not."

"Then I have to tell you, seh, that I am Captain McCalmont, and my outfit is the Robbers' Roost gang of outlaws." He was bending down over his son.

"I asked no question, my friend," said Lord Balshannon, "we never question a guest."

"You make me ashamed, seh. I came with a passel of lies, to prospect around with a view to doing you dirt."

Balshannon chuckled, and I saw by the glint in his eye that he was surely enjoying this robber. "You'll dine with me?" said he.

Captain McCalmont looked up sharply to see what game the patrone was playing.

"You will notice, Captain," said the boss, "that my house is like a deadfall trap. Indeed—ah, yes, only one door, you see."

For answer the robber unbuckled his belt and let it fall to the ground. "Take my gun," he said. "Do you suppose I daren't trust you, seh?"

A servant had brought the brandy, and McCalmont rubbed a little on his son's face, then poured a few drops between his teeth. Presently the lad stirred, moaning a little.

"Let's take him to the house," said I.

"No, Mistah Chalkeye Davies," answered the robber, "not until this gentleman knows some more, a whole lot more. Here, Curly," he whispered, "wake up, bo'."

The lad opened his eyes, clear blue like the sky, and smiled at his father. "Air you safe, dad?" he whispered.

"Sure safe."

Curly closed his eyes and lay peaceful.

The hold-up was squatting back on his heels, looking out across the desert. "Don Rex," said he, "I had a warning sent to Sheriff Bryant that I was coming down to lift all yo' hawsses. My wolves

tracked Bryant's rider to Lordsburgh, where he wired to you. You came running, and had all yo' hawsses rounded up convenient for me, in the stable-yard of this house. I thank you, seh."

"My good man, I'll bet you an even thousand dollars," said the patrone, "that you don't lift a hoof of my haw—*remuda*."

"It's a spawtin' offer, and tempts me," answered the outlaw. "Oblige me by taking my gun from the ground here and firing three shots in the air."

The patrone took the gun, and at his third shot saw a man ride out from behind the bastion on our right. McCalmont waved to him, and he came, putting a silk mask over his face as he rode, then halted in front of us, shy as a wolf, gun ready for war.

"Young man," said McCalmont, "repeat to these gentlemen here the whole of yo' awdehs fo' the day. Leave out the names of the men."

"You're giving us dead away!" said the rider, threatening McCalmont with his gun. "You mean that?"

"I mean what I say."

"Ah! Excuse me, McCalmont," said the patrone, "your—er—pistol, I think."

"Thanks, seh." McCalmont took the gun. "Repeat the awdehs!" he said. "These gentlemen are our friends."

"Well, you knows best," came the voice from behind the mask. "Three men to cover your ap-

proach to Holy Cross, and if there's trouble, to shoot Balshannon and Chalkeye. They're covered now. The wall of the stable court by the South-west Bastion to be mined with dynamite, and touched off at ten p.m. prompt; ten riders to get in through the breach in the wall, and drive out the bunch of horses; one man with an axe to split all the saddles in the harness-room, then join the herders."

"Leave out," said McCalmont, "all detail for pointing, swinging, and driving the herd. Go on."

"At one minute to ten, before the wall is blown away, ten riders are to make a bluff at attacking the main gate, and keep on amusing the garrison until the men with the naphtha cans have fired the private house.

"Rendezvous for all hands at Laguna by midnight, where we catch remounts, and sleep until daybreak, with a night herd of two, and one camp guard. At dawn we begin to gather cattle, while the horse wrangler and two men drive the *remuda* east. Rendezvous at Wolf Gap."

Lord Balshannon laughed aloud. "And how about poor old Bryant's posse of men?" he asked.

"Sheriff Bryant," said the Captain, "allows that he's to catch us in a sure fine trap, five miles due west of Lordsburgh. And now," he called to the mounted robber, "tell the boys that all awdehs are cancelled, that I'm supping to-night at Holy Crawss, and that the boys will wait for me at the place we fixed in case of accidents."

The man rode off hostile and growling aloud, while Balshannon stood watching to see which way he went.

"McCalmont," said he, and I took note of just one small quiver in his voice, "may I venture to ask one question?"

"A hundred, seh."

"You seem to know the arrangement of my house —its military weakness. How did you learn that?"

The outlaw stood up facing him, and took from the breast of his shirt a folded paper. Balshannon and I spread it open, and found a careful plan of Holy Cross. At the foot of the paper there was a memorandum signed "George Ryan."

"I may tell you," said the robber, "that if I succeeded in burning yo' home, stealing yo' hawsses, and running yo' cattle, Mr. George Ryan proposed to pay my wolves the sum of ten thousand dollars."

"Carry out your plans," the patrone was pleased all to pieces. "I'd love to fight your wolves. I've got some dynamite, too! Think of what you're losing!"

"Lose nothing!" said the robber. "I'll collect fifty thousand dollars compensation from Ryan!" He stooped down and gathered his son in his arms. "And now, will you have us for guests in yo' home? Say the word, and we go."

Balshannon lifted his hat and made a little bow, much polite. "My house," he answered in Spanish, "is yours, señor!"

CHAPTER V

BACK TO THE WOLF PACK

BEING given to raising fowls, I'm instructed on eggs a whole lot. Killed young, an egg is a sure saint, being a pure white on the outside, and inwardly a beautiful yellow; but since she ain't had no chance to go bad she's not responsible. But when an egg has lingered in this wicked world, exposed to heat, cold, and other temptations, she succumbs, being weary of her youth and shamed of virtue. So she participates in vice to the best of her knowledge and belief. Yes, an old egg is bad every time, and the more bluff she makes with her white and holy shell, the more she's rotten inside, a whited sepulchre.

I reckon it's been the same with me, for at Holy Cross I was kept good and fresh by the family. Shell, white, and yolk, I was a good egg then, with no special inducements to vice. Now I know in my poor old self what an uphill pull it is trying to reform a stale egg.

In those days, when I thought I was being good on my own merits, I had no mercy on bad eggs like poor McCalmont, however much he tried to reform.

Balshannon took me aside, and wanted to know if he could trust this robber.

"So far as you can throw a dawg," said I.

That night the lady fed alone, and we dined in the great hall, the patrone at the head of the table, McCalmont and Curly on one side, the padre and me on the other. Curly's ankle being twisted, and wrapped up most painful in wet bandages, the priest allowed that he couldn't ride away with his father, but had better stay with us.

Curly shied at that. "I won't stay none!" he growled.

But McCalmont began to talk for Curly, explaining that robbery was a poor vocation in life, full of uncertainties. He wanted his son to be a cowboy.

"If he rides for me," says I, "he'll have to herd with my Mexicans. They're greasers, but Curly's white, and they won't mix."

"I'd rather," says McCalmont, "for Arizona cowboys are half-wolf anyways, but this outfit is all dead gentle, and good for my cub."

Then the boss offered wages to Curly, and the priest took sides with him. So Curly kicked, and I growled, but the boy was left at Holy Cross to be converted, and taught punching cows.

As to McCalmont, he rode off that night, gathered his wolves, and jumped down on Mr. George Ryan at the Jim Crow Mine, near Tombstone. He wanted

"compensation" for not getting any plunder out of Holy Cross, so he robbed Mr. Ryan of seventy thousand dollars. The newspapers in Tombstone sobbed over poor Mr. Ryan, and howled for vengeance on McCalmont's wolves.

Curly read the newspaper account, and was pleased all to pieces. Then he howled all night because he was left behind.

It took me some time to get used to that small youngster, who was a whole lot older and wiser than he looked. He had a room next to my quarters, where he camped on a bed in the far corner, and acted crazy if ever I tried to come in. Because he insisted on keeping the shutters closed, that room was dark as a wolf's mouth—a sort of den, where one could see nothing but his eyes, glaring green or flame-coloured like those of a panther. If he slept, he curled up like a little wild animal, one ear cocked, one eye open, ready to start broad awake at the slightest sound. Once I caught him sucking his swollen ankle, which he said was a sure good medicine. I have seen all sorts of animals dress their own wounds that way, but never any human except little Curly. As to his food, he would eat the things he knew about, but if the taste of a dish was new to him, he spat as if he were poisoned. At first he was scared of Lady Balshannon, hated the patrone, and surely despised me; but one day I saw him limping, attended by four of our dogs and a brace of cats,

across to the stableyard. I sneaked upstairs to the roof and watched his play.

There must have been fifty ponies in the yard, and every person of them seemed to know Curly, for those who were loose came crowding round him, and those who were tied began whickering. Horses have one call, soft and low, which they keep for the man they love, and one after another gave that love-cry for Curly. He treated them all like dirt until he came to Rebel, an outlaw stallion. Once Rebel tried to murder a Mexican; several times he had pitched off the best of our broncho busters; always he acted crazy with men and savage with mares. Yet he never even snorted at Curly, but let that youngster lead him by the mane to a mounting-block; then waited for him to climb up, and trotted him round the yard tame as a sheep.

"Curly!" said I from the roof. And the boy stiffened at once, hard and fierce. "Curly, that horse is yours."

"I know that!" said Curly; "cayn't you see fo' yo'self?"

The dogs loved Curly first, then the horses, and next the Mexican cowboys, but at last he seemed to take hold of all our outfit. He thawed out slowly to me, then to the patrone and the old priest; afterwards even to Lady Balshannon. So we found out that this cub from the Wolf Pack was only fierce and wild with strangers, but inside so gentle that he was

more like a girl than a boy. He was rather wide at the hips, bow-legged just a trace, and when his ankle healed we found he had a most tremendous grip in the saddle, the balance of a hawk. Yes, that small, slight, delicate lad was the most perfect rider I've seen in a world of great horsemen. The meanest horse was tame as a dog with Curly, while in tracking, scouting, and natural sense with cattle I never knew his equal. Yet, as I said before, he was small, weak, badly built—more like a girl than a boy. With strangers he was a vicious young savage; with friends, like a little child. He did a year's work on the range with me, and that twelve months I look back to as a sort of golden age at Holy Cross.

We were raising the best horses and the finest cattle in Arizona; prices were high, and the patrone was too busy to have time for cards or drink over at Tombstone; and even the lady braced up enough to go for evening rides.

And then the Honourable James du Chesnay rode home to us from college.

The patrone and his lady were making a feast for their son; the cowboys were busy as a swarm of bees decorating the great hall; the padre fluttered about like a black moth, getting in everybody's way; so Curly and I rode out on the Lordsburgh trail to meet up with the Honourable Jim.

"I hate him!" Curly snarled.

"Why for, boy?"

"Dunno. I hate him!"

I told Curly about my first meeting with that same little boy Jim, aged six, and him turning his hot gun loose against hostile Indians, shooting gay and promiscuous, scared of nothing.

"I hate him," snarled Curly between his teeth. "Last night the lady was reading to me yonder, on the roof-top."

"Well?"

"There was a big chief on the range, an old long-horn called Abraham, and his lil' ole squaw Sarah. They'd a boy in their lodge like me, another woman's kid, not a son, but good enough for them while they was plumb lonely. That Ishmael colt was sure wild—came of bad stock, like me. 'His hand,' says the book, 'will be up agin every man, and every man's hand agin him.' I reckon that colt came of robber stock, same as me, but I allow they liked him some until their own son came. Then their own son came—a shorely heap big warrior called Isaac—and the old folks, they didn't want no more outlaw colts running loose around on their pasture. They shorely turned that Ishmael out to die in the desert. Look up thar, Chalkeye, in the north, and you'll see this Isaac a-coming on the dead run for home."

"Curly," says I, "this young chief won't have no use for old Chalkeye; he'll want to be boss on his own home range, and it's time he started in responsible to run Holy Cross. At the month's end I quit

from this outfit, and I'm taking up a ranche five mile on the far side of Tombstone. Thanks to the patrone, I've saved ponies and cattle enough to stock my little ranche yonder. Will you come at forty dollars a month, and punch cows for Chalkeye?"

"No, I won't, never. I come from the Wolf Pack, and I'm going back to the Wolf Pack to be a wolf. That's where I belong—thar in the desert!"

He swept out his hand to the north, and there, over a rise of the ground, I saw young Jim du Chesnay coming, on the dead run for home.

CHAPTER VI

MY RANGE WHELPS WHIMPERING

NOW that I have won through the dull beginning of this story, I've just got to stop and pat myself before going on any further. There were steep bits on the trail where I panted for words, rocks where I stumbled, holes where I bogged down to the hocks, cross-roads where I curved around lost. At the best I'd a poor eye, a lame tongue, and a heap big inclination to lie down and quit; so I've done sure fine to keep a-going. Ride me patient still, for I'm near the beginning of the troubles which picked up Jim, Curly, and me, to whirl us along like a hurricane afire. Soon we'll break gait from a limp to a trot, from trot to canter, then from lope to gallop.

I suppose I had better explain some about the city of Tombstone, and how it got to have such a cheerful name. That was away back in 1878, when two prospectors, Ed Schieffelin and his brother, pulled out to explore the desert down by the Mexican boundary. The boys allowed they'd better take their coffins along with them, because if they

missed being scalped by Apaches, or wiped out by border ruffians, or starved to death, they would surely perish of thirst. "The only thing you boys will find is your tombstone."

Well, they called their discovery Tombstone, but it was one of the richest silver-mines on earth, and a city grew up here in the desert. For the first few years it was most surely hot, full of artists painting the town red, and shooting each other up with a quick gun. That was the time of Mankiller Johnson, Curly Bill, Roosian George, Brazelton of Tucson, the robber, and a young gentleman aged twenty-two, called Billy the Kid, who wiped out twenty fellow-citizens and followed them rapid to a still warmer climate. When these gentlemen had shot each other for their country's good, and a great many more died a natural death by being lynched, the city got more peaceful. In the second year it was burnt, and entirely rebuilt in a fortnight. The first large gambling joint was called the "Sepulchre," the first weekly paper was the *Epitaph*, and in the eighth year Mr. Ryan built his hotel—the "Mortuary." That was in 1886, the year of the Apache raids, when I went with the new patrone to Holy Cross. Twelve years I rode for Balshannon, then Jim being in his eighteenth year, took charge as foreman and mayor-domo of that grand old ranche.

It was the 4th of July, 1900, before I saw that youngster again. We gathered at Tombstone then

to celebrate the birthday of our great republic, and it does me good every time to see our flag Old Glory waving above the cities of freedom. The Honourable Jim must needs run a mare of his at the races, the same, as I told him, being suitable meat to bait traps.

I made him an offer for that mare: ten cents for her tail as a fly switch, a dollar for her hide, and a five-cent rim-fire cigar if he would dispose of the other remains. He raced her, lost one thousand dollars, and came to me humble for the money to pay his debts. I told him to burn his own paws in his own fire, and be content with his own howls.

"They're debts of honour!" says he.

"Debts of dishonour, and you're the Dishonourable James du Idiot. There's your travelling pony been standing saddled all day in the blazing heat without a feed or a drink. You call yourself a horseman?"

Afterwards we smoothed our fur, and had our supper together. Jim promised to be good, go home, do his honest cowboy work, and look after the poor lone lady who was dying by inches at Holy Cross.

Yet I was proud of that boy, keen, fierce, stubborn as a wild ass, with the air and temper of a thoroughbred, and a laugh which spoiled me for preaching. He was smart, too, in a new shirt of white silk, a handkerchief round his neck striped cream and rose colour, Mexican trousers of yellow leather studded down the seams with lumps of turquoise stones in

silver settings, big silver spurs, and on his belt a silver-mounted 45-Colt revolver. I've got no earthly use for a boy who slouches. At supper, while I preached, he called me an old fool for caring when he was bad. Then he told me good-bye in the dusk, and set off on his hundred-mile trail for Holy Cross.

I rode home thoughtful, and lay long awake in my little dobe cabin at Las Salinas, thinking about that boy, whose mother was sick, and his father riding to sure destruction, a gambler, a drunkard, hopeless, lost—the best friend I ever had in the world. When I woke the faint light of dawn shone through the cabin window, and brightened the saddles on the wall. Something was touching my face, something cold, so I grabbed it quick—a little small hand. Then I heard Curly's low, queer laugh. "You, Chalkeye!" he whispered.

He was sitting on the stool beside my bunk, dead weary, covered with dust from the trail. Somehow the boy seemed to have got smaller instead of growing up, and he sure looked weak and delicate for such a life as he led. Twenty years old? He didn't seem fifteen, and yet he spoke old-fashioned, heaps wise and experienced.

"Whar you from?" says I, yawning.

"Speak low, and no questions," said Curly in a hard voice, for on the range we never ask a guest his name, or where he comes from, or which way he

goes. When he comes we don't need to tell him any welcome; when he goes we say, 'Adios!' for he'll sure have need of an Almighty Father out in the desert.

"Chalkeye," says my wolf, "are you alone?"

"Sure."

"No boys over thar in yo' ram pasture?"

"My riders is wolfing in Tombstone, but they'll stray back 'fore noon."

"Hide me up in yo' barn fo' the day, then."

"An yo' horse, Curly?"

"Say you won him last night at cyards. We'll hide the saddle."

"Have coffee first?"

"I surely will," and kneeling stiff, weary by the hearth, he began to make up a fire.

"There's a notice up for you, Curly. They're offering two thousand dollars dead or alive."

"For robbing that Union Pacific train?"

"I reckon."

"Chalkeye, did you ever know me to lie?"

"None, Curly."

"Then you'll believe me. I wasn't there when our wolves got that train. I've never done no robberies, ever yet."

"I hope you never may."

"Sometimes I hope so too," he was holding up his hands before the fire. "How's the patrone?" he asked, as he put on the coffee-pot to boil.

"Going downhill rapid. He's mortgaged Holy Cross to the last dollar."

"What's his play?"

"Faro and monte—you'll see him bucking the game all night down at the Sepulchre. He drinks hard now."

"Pore old—er chap, don't you know! And the lady?"

"Dying out down at the Hacienda. The padre sits with her."

"And the young chief?"

"Do you still hate him?"

"Why should I care?"

"Tell me on the dead-thieving Curly, you do care some what happens to Holy Cross? Don't you remember old Ryan inviting yo' wolves to eat up the Hacienda?"

"They had stewed Ryan for breakfast afterwards, and he sure squealed!"

"Yesterday I seen a bar keep' who belongs to Ryan go up against young Jim and rob him of a thousand dollars over a sure-thing horse race. Any day you'll see Ryan's hired robbers running the crooked faro and monte games where Balshannon is losing what's left of Holy Cross. Ryan hired the range wolves, and they went straight for his own throat, but now the town wolves are eating yo' best friends."

"The only friends I have excep' my gang," said

Curly. "Why don't you shoot up them town scouts, and that Ryan?"

"My gun against a hundred, Curly? No. I tried to get these crooks run out of the city, but Ryan's too strong for me. If I shot him up I'd only get lynched by his friends."

"Show me yo' cyards, old Chalkeye—let me see yo' play."

"I aim to turn the range wolves loose on Tombstone."

"The range wolves is some fastidious, Chalkeye, and wants clean meat for their kill."

"You don't want to save your friends."

"The boss wolf leads, not me, and he wants good meat. I must point to good meat, or he ain't hungry none."

"Ryan has lots of wealth."

"We ate some once, and he's got monotonous."

"How about his son, the millionaire?"

"My wolves would shorely enjoy a millionaire, but —shucks! We'll never get so much as a smell at him."

"Cayn't you suggest some plan for checking Ryan?"

"I'll think that over. I cal'late to spend some weeks in Tombstone."

"Two thousand dollars dead or alive! Why, lad, you're crazy."

"When I'm disguised you'll never know it's me."

"Disguised? As how?"

"As a woman perhaps, or maybe as a man. I dunno yet."

I went to sniff the morning, and at the door found Curly's horse, loaded with an antelope lashed across the saddle.

"I shot you some meat fo' yo' camp," said Curly, throwing coffee into the boiling pot. "Now let's have breakfast."

I went out and caught some eggs, then we had breakfast.

CHAPTER VII

AT THE SIGN OF RYAN'S HAND

AT the time of Curly's visit I was breaking in a bunch of fool ponies, and along in August sold them to the Lawson Cattle Company. Their Flying W. Outfit was forming up just then for the fall round-up, so by way of swift delivery I took my ponies down by rail to Lordsburgh. Their camp was beside the stock-yard, and the little old cow town was surely alive with their cowboys, stamping new boots around to get them used, shooting off their guns to show how good they felt, filling up with chocolate creams and pickles to while the time between meals, sampling the whisky, the games, and the druggist's sure-thing medicines, or racing ponies for trial along the street.

Now I reckon that the sight and smell of a horse comes more natural to me than anything else on earth, while the very dust from a horse race gets into my blood, and I can't come near the course without my head getting rattled. But from the first whiff of that town I caught the scent of something going wrong, for most of the stock-yard was full of cattle

branded with a cross, and the Holy Cross *vaqueros* were loading them into a train. Moreover, by many a sign I gathered fact on fact, that this delivery of Balshannon's cattle was out of the way of business, not a shipment of beef to the market, but a sale of breeding-stock, which meant nothing short of ruin. I strayed through that town feeling sick, refusing to drink with the punchers, or talk cow with the cattlemen, or take any interest in life. At the post office I met up with Jim, face to face, and he tried to pass by short-sighted.

"Boy," said I, as I grabbed him, "why for air you shamed?"

"Leave me go," he snarled.

"For why, son?"

"'Cause I'm shamed."

"Of yo'self?"

"Shamed of my father. Our breeding-stock is gone to pay his gambling debts."

"All of it?"

"What's left is offal. Now you leave me go!"

"Whar to?"

"To follow Balshannon's trail—drink, gambling, shame, death, and a good riddance."

"You'll come with me first," says I, "for an oyster stew and some bear sign. I ain't ate since sun-up."

He came with me for a stew and the doughnuts, which made him feel some better in his heart, and after that I close-herded him until the cattle were

shipped, through the evening, through the night, and on to daybreak. Then I rounded up his greaser cowboys from various gambling joints, and pointed him and them for Holy Cross.

"Boy," says I at parting, "you've been at work on the range for long months now, and yo' mother is surely sick for the sight of yo' fool face. Go home."

"You old Chalkeye fraud," says he, with a grin as wide as the sunrise, "you're getting rid of me because you want to have a howling time on your lonesome, with all that money you got for your rotten ponies."

It was a surely fine sight to see my Jim hit the trail, the silver fixings of his saddle and cowboy harness bright as stars, his teeth aflash, his eyes a-shining, as he stooped down to give me cheek at parting, and lit out with his tail up for home. His riders saluted me as their old chief in passing, calling, "Buenas dias señor, adios!" Yes, they were good boys, with all their dark skin and their habit of missing the wash-time; light-built riders, with big, soft eyes always watchful, grave manners, gentle voices, gay laughter, and their beautiful Spanish talk like low thunder rolling. They were brave as lions, they were true as steel, and foolish only in the head, I reckon. So they passed by me one by one, saluting with a lift of the cigarette, a glance of the eye, dressed gorgeous in dull gold leather, bright gold straw sombreros, rainbow-coloured serapes, spur and

gun aflash, reins taut, and horses dancing, and were gone in a cloud of dust and glitter away across the desert. I was never to see them again.

It made me feel quite a piece wistful to think of Holy Cross down yonder beyond the rim of the far grass, for that house had been more than home to me, and that range was my pasture where I had grazed for twelve good years. I could just judge, too, how Jim was wanting for home swift, while the segundo, good old Juan Terrazas, would pray the young lord to spare the little horses. "'Tis sixty leagues, and these our horses are but children, señor."

"Confound the horses!" says Jim, "let's burn the trail for home. Roll your tail, Pedro! *Vamenos!*"

"But the child horses, my lord, grass-fed only, in the hot desert."

"Roll your tail and roll it high,
We'll all be angels by-and-by!"

And Jim would lope along with a glad heart, singing the round-up songs—

"Little black bull came down the hillside,
Down the hillside, down the hillside,
Little black bull came down the hillside,
Long time ago."

Then he would go on some more happy when he thought of the big tune to "Roll, Powder, Roll!"

As I heard afterwards, the outfit was rounding the

"THE STRANGER SQUATTED DOWN ON A ROCK . . . AND SAT WIPING HIS FACE"

shoulder of the hill about five miles out when, on the ridge beyond, Mr. Jim's bright eye took note of something alive.

"A vulture only, my lord," says the segundo, "eating a dead horse."

"A quart of kittens!" says my lord, some scornful. "Call that a vulture?" and off he sailed, clattering down a slope of loose rocks. "That bird is a man-bird flapping at us for help. Segundo, you've no more range of sight than a boiled owl."

The segundo came grumbling along behind, and they curved off across the level. "That man has lost his horse," says Jim; "thirsty, I guess, and signalling for help. Go back, Terrazas, and tell the men to wait."

"Si, señor," and Terrazas rolled back to the trail.

As Jim got nearer he saw that the man on the hill had signalled nothing, but his coat tails were a-flutter in the wind. Now he came all flapping from rock to rock down the hillside. "Hello!" Jim shouted.

The stranger squatted down on a rock to wait for him, and sat wiping his face on a red handkerchief. He was dressed all in black, a sky-scout of sorts, but dusty and making signs as though he couldn't shout for thirst. Jim took his half-gallon canteen, ranged up, and dismounted. "Curious," he was thinking; "lips not swollen, tongue not black, this man ain't thirsty much!"

"My deah young friend," says the preacher be-

tween drinks, "you're the means under Heaven of my deliverance"—gulp—"from a shocking end."

"Scared you'd have to go to heaven?" asked Jim.

"I was afraid"—gulp—"that I must give up my labours in this vale of"—gulp—"for which I was found unworthy."

"Is that so?"

"Seh, I have walked far, and am much exhausted."

Jim looked at the preacher's pants, and saw that a streak of the cloth from knee to ankle was dusty none—the same being the mark of the stirrup leathers. He could not have walked a hundred yards from his horse.

"Stranger," says Jim, "your horse is just on the other side of this hill."

"Yes, indeed—but it never lets me get any nearer, and I've chased it for miles!"

"I'll catch your horse." Jim swung to his seat, spurred off, circled the hilltop, and found the preacher's horse, rein to the ground, unable to trot without being tripped at once, dead easy to catch at one jump. This parson man was a liar, anyway.

Then something caught Jim's eye, a sort of winking star on a hill-crest far to the east. He watched that star winking steady to right and left. The thing was a heliograph making talk, as it supposed, to the preacher, and Jim watched harder than ever.

He couldn't read the signs, so wondering most plentiful, he spurred up to find out if anything more

could be seen from the crest of the hill. Yes, there lay the railroad, and the town of Lordsburgh, plain as a map. This preacher had been sly, and heaps untruthful, so Jim rode back leading his horse, but kept the sights he had seen for his own consumption.

"I suah thank y'u, seh," says the preacher. "Alas! that I should be so po' a horseman. My sacred calling has given me no chances of learning to ride like you-all."

Jim watched him swing to the saddle as only a stockman can. You may dress a puncher in his last coffin, but no disguise short of that will spoil his riding.

"Mebbe," says the preacher, "you can favour me with a few hints on the art of settin' a—whoa! hawss! And if you please, we will go more gradual 'cause the motion is pitching my po' kidneys up through my neck. Whoa! Yow!"

Jim broke away at a trot, sitting side-saddle to enjoy the preacher, who jolted beside him like a sack of dogs.

"Stranger," says he, "the trail is where my men are waiting yonder. To the left it goes to Lordsburgh, to the right it runs straight to Bryant's and on to Holy Cross. Good morning, sir," and he left on the dead run.

"My deah young friend," the preacher wailed at him. "Whoa! Whoa, now! I've got mislaid! I place myself in yo' hands."

Jim reined.

"Well, where do you want to go?"

"I want to find a wild, a sinful young man by the name of du Chesnay. He's the Honourable James du Chesnay. Perhaps you know him?"

"Partly. Well, what's your business with him?"

"I suffer," says the preacher, "from clergyman's sore throat—ahic! Permit me, seh, to ride with you while I explain my business."

"As you please." They had gained the trail, and Jim swung into it with the preacher, calling back to his riders to keep within range astern.

"Besides," says the preacher, coughing behind his hand, "I am somewhat timid—there are so many robbers that I yearn for yo' company for protection."

Jim yelled back to his men in Spanish, "Boys, just watch this stranger—he's no good. Keep your guns handy, and if he tries to act crooked, shoot prompt!"

"Thank you, seh!" says the preacher.

"And now, your business, quick!"

"It appears," the preacher groaned, "that some wicked men have been behaving deceitfully in the purchase of a flock of cows from this young gentleman."

"Eh?"

"Yes, they paid for his flock with a draft made in favour of Lord Balshannon, on the National Bank at

Tombstone. What a dreadful name for a city!—suggestive of——"

"Rats! Go on, man!"

"This draft on the bank from Jabez Y. Stone, who bought yo' cattle, seh, you forwarded from Lordsburgh yesterday. It will be presented to-day by Lord Balshannon at the bank in Tombstone."

"How do you know?"

"Unhappily, my sacred calling has left me quite unfamiliah with the carnal affairs of this most wicked country."

"Well, what's wrong? The bank wired yesterday morning that they held money to meet this draft. Stone showed me the telegram."

"Up to noon," said the preacher, "there was money in the bank; some forty thousand dollars in the name of Jabez Y. Stone, ready to meet yo' draft, and pay for the cattle."

"I know that!"

"At noon yesterday that money was withdrawn from the bank."

"Impossible!"

"Jabez Y. Stone had given a previous draft to another man for the money. The other man got the plunder—the—ahic!—dross, I mean. Oh that we poh mortals should so crave after the dross which perisheth!"

"Don't preach!"

"Oh, my young brother, the little word in season——"

"I wish it would choke you. Now who drew that money?"

"A carnal man — yo' fatheh's mortal enemy — Misteh Ryan."

"Ryan! Ryan!"

"Misteh George Ryan, yessir. To-day yo' father presents a worthless paper at the bank in exchange for his breeding cattle. Oh, how grievous a thing it is that deceitful men should so deceive themselves, preparing for a sultry hereafter. Think of these poh dumb driven cattle, exchanged for a bogus draft upon a miserable, miserable bank—how——"

"Luis!" Jim yelled, and his segundo, old Luis Terrazas, came a-flying. "Luis, take the men home —I've got to go back to Lordsburgh."

"Stay!" The preacher lifted his hand, brushed back the hat from his face, and stared into Jim's eyes. "Chalkeye Davies is yondeh at Lordsburgh thar — you can trust him, eh? Send a letter to Chalkeye; ask him to wire the sheriff at Albuquerque to hold that thar train of cattle pending inquiries."

"I'm going back myself. You stand aside!"

"Seh, if you don't ride straight for Holy Cross, you ain't goin' to see yo' mother alive—she's sinking rapid."

"How do you know what's happening at Holy

Cross, at Tombstone, and at Lordsburgh, and all these places a hundred miles apart?"

"Have I said anything, boy, that you cayn't believe?"

"You lied when you said you were thirsty, when you claimed to have walked, when you made out you couldn't catch your horse, and couldn't ride—you lied, and you're a liar!"

The preacher reached for his hip, and a dozen revolvers covered him instant.

"Seh," he said, quite gentle, "my handkerchief is in my hip-pocket; observe me blow my nose at yo' remarks."

He trumpeted into his big red handkerchief.

"Why do you make this bluff," says Jim, "at being a preacher, when you've been all your life in the saddle?"

"Yo' questions, seh, are personal for a stranger, and the character you gave me to yo' greasers was some hasty, and the salute of guns you offer makes me feel unworthy. As to your thanks for an honest warning to save yo' lost cattle and haste to yo' dying mother——"

Jim flushed with shame.

"I beg your pardon, sir."

"And you accept my warning?"

"If you'll prove you forgive me by shaking hands, Mr.——"

"Misteh? Just call me friend—no more. And

Jim, when you've been to Holy Crawss, yo' natural feelings will call you swift to Tombstone, where you'll find your father in mortal danger, I feah."

"In mortal danger?"

"Unless," said the stranger, "a mere friend can save him."

Jim looked into this stranger's face, at the tanned hide, seamed and furrowed with trouble, the strong hard lips, twisty with a sort of queer smile, at the eyes, which seemed to be *haunted.*

"Sir," he said, "I'll do what you tell me."

So he took paper and pencil from his wallets, leaned over the horn of his saddle, and made it desk enough for what he had to write.

"Will this do?" says he, passing his letter to the stranger.

"Yes, I reckon. Add, sonny, that Misteh Michael Ryan's private cyar is due from the east to-morrow, with the Pacific Express. It's timed to reach Tombstone at 10.5 p.m. Chalkeye will be thar."

Jim wrote all that down, then looked up, fearful, surprised at this preacher knowing so much, then glanced all round to see which man had the best horse for his message.

"Onate!" he called.

"Si, señor."

"Take this letter, Onate, to Mr. Chalkeye Davies in Lordsburgh. Then you'll follow me home."

Onate uncovered, took the letter, and bowed his

thanks. "Gracias señor, adios!" and curved off swift for Lordsburgh.

Then Jim saw the preacher's eyes boring him through.

"You will shake hands?" he asked.

"With a glad hand," said Captain McCalmont. "Put her thar, boy! I hope when we meet up again you'll remember me as a friend."

So the great robber swung his horse, and spurred up back to his hilltop, while Jim and the *vaqueros* burned the trail for home.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE

IT used to be a great sight down at Holy Cross when the *vaqueros* came back from the round-up, serapes flapping in the wind, hats waving, guns popping, ponies tearing around, and eating up the ground. And then the house folk came swarming out to meet them, the little boys and dogs in a shouting heap, the girls bunched together and squealing, the young wives laughing, the old mothers, the tottering granddads, all plumb joyful to welcome the riders home. So they would mix up, crowd through the gates, and on to the stable court to see a beef shot for the feast. Presently the little boys would come out in the dusk of the evening, bareback to herd the ponies through the pasture gate, and scamper back barefoot to the house in time for supper. All night long the lamps were alight in the great hall, the guitars a-strumming, and young feet dancing, and last, at the break of dawn, the chapel bell would call for early mass.

But this was the last home-coming for the folks at Holy Cross, and far away across the desert Jim's

riders heard the bell—the minute bell tolling soft for the dead. The people met them at the gates, but all the boys uncovered, riding slow. No beef would be killed that night, no lights would shine, no guitars would strum for the dance.

Inside the main gate Jim's servant took his horse, and the lad walked on with clashing spurs to meet the old padre at the door of the dining-hall.

"Take off your spurs," said the priest, "come softly."

So he followed the padre across the bare, white-washed dining-hall, and on along the cloister of the palm tree court. He heard the death-cry keening out of the shadows, the bell tolled, and he went on through the dark rooms, until he came to the señora, with women kneeling about the bed, and candles lighted at her head and feet.

* * * * *

The daybreak was bitter cold when Jim came out into the palm tree court, shivering while he watched the little, far-up clouds flushed with the dawn.

He felt that something was all gone wrong in the house, with the hollow echoes, every time he moved, crashing back from out of the dark. Then in the black darkness of the rooms he saw a lighted candle moving, slow through the air.

"Who's there!" he shouted, and at that the light

came straight at him with something grey behind. "Who are you? What are you doing here?" Then he saw it was Sheriff Bryant.

"Easy, boy, easy!" says Dick in his slow Texan drawl; "I cal'late, Jim, we may as well have coffee, eh, boy?"

So he led Jim into the dining-hall, where he had cooked some coffee on the brazier. He set his candle down on the long table, and beside it a stick of sealing-wax and a bundle of tape.

"Why, sheriff," says Jim, "what do you want with these?"

"Take yo' coffee, son. It's cold this mawnin'."

Jim fell to sipping his coffee, while old Dick sat crouched down over the brazier.

"My old woman's been here this fortnight past," he said, "and I collected a doctor of sorts."

"You never sent for father, or for me."

"I had reasons, boy, good reasons. Jim, thar's trouble a-comin', and you've got to face it manful."

"Oh, speak out!"

"As I says to my ole woman only yesterday, I'd have loaned the money myself to yo' poh mother, only I don't have enough to lend to a dawg."

"What do you mean?"

"I couldn't turn the po' lady out of her home, so I got a stay of execution from the Court, to give her time to escape. She's done escaped now, and I got to act."

"Sheriff!"

"Yes, I'm sheriff, and I'd rather break a laig. But I'm the People's servant, Jim, and my awdehs is to seize this hull estate, in the name o' the People."

"To seize this house!"

"To turn you and all yo' servants out of Holy Crawss, and put the People's seal on the front gate."

"Sheriff, you can't!"

"Boy, take this writ."

Jim took the paper, spread it out, and read—

"Jim," said the sheriff, "we must bury this lady first. Then you want to take the best hawss you've got, while I'm not looking, and ride to my home. Yo're mo' than welcome thar."

"Who's done this thing?"

"Yo' father's debts."

"Don't beat about the bush — who's done this thing?"

"George Ryan."

CHAPTER IX

WAR SIGNS

ON Tuesday morning, after I headed Jim for Holy Cross, I had to stay over in Lordsburgh, finish my horse deal with the Lawson Cattle Company, then get my men back to Tombstone by the evening train. I had only three cowboys, Monte, Custer, and Ute; nice children, too, when they were all asleep, but fresh that morning, full of dumb yearnings for trouble, and showing plentiful symptoms of being young. At breakfast-time I pointed out some items in the local scenery, a doctor's shambles, a hospital, a mortuary, and an adjacent graveyard.

"Now, you kids," says I, "you may be heap big tigers; but don't you get wild-catting around too numerous, because I ain't aiming to waste good money on yo' funerals."

They said they'd be fearful good, and might they have ten dollars apiece for the church offertory? They set off with three pure hearts, and thirty dollars.

Now I reckon there were twenty-five Flying W.

riders owning the town that day, and they began politely by asking my boys if Chalkeye's squint was contagious, and whether that accounted for symptoms of mange in his ponies.

My boys were dead gentle, and softly answered that Lawson was the worst horse-thief in Arizona; that Lawson's foreman was three-parts negro and the rest polecat, and that Lawson's riders had red streaks round their poor throats because the hang-rope had failed to do them justice.

The Flying W. inquired if my three riders was a case of triplets, or only an unfortunate mistake. Then my boys produced their six-guns and allowed they'd been whelped savage, raised dangerous, and turned loose hostile—and I only arrived just in time to save them from being spoiled for further use on earth. I challenged the Flying W. to race their best pets against my "mangy" ponies, and both sides agreed to have a drink with me, instead of wasting mounted funeral pageants on such a one-horse town as little Lordsburgh.

So while I was playing nursemaid, herding all those kids, who should roll up the street but young Onate, of Holy Cross, on the dead run with a letter from Jim. The more kids, the worse trouble. Well, when I had swallowed Jim's letter, I fired off a batch of telegrams and soon had a wire back from the Albuquerque sheriff. "Will impound them cattle," says he, "pending advices from Bryant." So I sent

Onate streaking after Bryant, and went on playing at nursemaid until I was plumb scared that I'd be sprouting a cap and ribbons. Anyway, I didn't have time to think until the evening train pulled into Tombstone. By that time my three babies were dancing a fandango upon the roof of the car. When the train stopped I hauled them down by the legs, petted them some with my boot, and told them to go away home. They went, with a bet between them, which would be first at my ranche.

Just for the sake of peace and quietness I stayed that night in Tombstone, and sat around next morning smoking long cigars while I made my poor brain think. There were points in Jim's letter, and facts I had picked up casual at Lordsburgh, and words of gossip dropped in the hotel; but to put them all together would have puzzled a large-sized judge. Still, by all the tracks, the signs, the signals, and the little smells, I reckoned that Mr. Ryan was mighty near reaching a crisis, and apt to break out sudden as dynamite. First, here was Sheriff Bryant with two deputies, his wife, and a medicine-man, camped down at Holy Cross. Now Bryant would scarcely take deputy-sheriffs down there to nurse a sick lady. Had Holy Cross been seized at last for Balshannon's debts? That smelt of Ryan.

Secondly, Jim had gone to heaps of trouble gathering all the breeding-stock of Holy Cross, for a party named Jabez Y. Stone to steal them convenient.

Jabez Y. had once been a bar-tender in Ryan's hotel —so that smelt of Ryan, too.

Thirdly, here was poor Balshannon being held with a string round his leg at the Sepulchre saloon, by the two crookedest gamblers in Arizona, the same being Low-Lived Joe and Louisiana Pete. Once, Joe, being gaoled for killing a Mexican, Ryan had put up money for a lawyer to get him released. So if these two thugs were instructed to hold and skin the Dook, that likewise smelt strong of Ryan.

Fourthly, here was young Michael Ryan in his private car from New York, burning the rails to reach Tombstone by ten o'clock this night. The smell of Ryan surely tainted the whole landscape. Now just throw back to the words of Ryan's letter which fourteen long years before he had nailed upon the door of Holy Cross :—

> "The time will come when, driven from this your new home, without a roof to cover you, or a crust to eat, your wife and son turned out to die in the desert, you will beg for even so much as a drink of water, and it will be thrown in your face. I shall not die until I have seen the end of your accursed house."

So this was Ryan's plan—the work of fourteen years; industrious a whole lot, and plenty treacherous, but coming surely true. He had waited until he knew the lady was mostly dead, then turned her out of Holy Cross to die in the desert. The cattle were

stolen, Balshannon was tied down for slaughter, and Michael would come to see the finish at ten o'clock to-night.

I began to reckon up Balshannon's friends, cowboys and robbers mostly, scattered anyway across the big range of the desert. They would not hear me if I howled for help.

But Ryan was respectable. He was Chairman of the Committee of Public Safety which lynched bad men when they became too prevalent with their guns. Ryan was our leading citizen, heaps rich, and virtuous no end. The Law would side with him, and as to the officers of the law, judges, and City Marshal, and the police—they'd got elected because he spoke for them. He owned the city, could bring out hundreds of men to take his side. What could I do against this Ryan's friends?

I knew that young Curly was hid in Tombstone somewheres, and after a search I found him. The boy was so disguised he hardly knew himself.

"Chalkeye," says he, "you want a talk?" He looked sort of scared and anxious.

"I do."

"If Ryan's folk see you making talk with me, they'll think there's some new plot against the white men. Just you watch where I go, and follow casual."

He led me to a little room he rented over a barber's shop, and looking from the window I noticed that

Ryan's hotel was just across the street. Curly left the room door open, because he didn't want any spy to use the keyhole.

"Now," says he, "make yo' voice tame, or we'll be overheard. Don't show yo'self off at that window, but keep your eyes skinned thar, while I watch the stairs. What is yo' trouble?"

"Whar are yo' range wolves?"

"They're a whole lot absent," says Curly.

"Cayn't you trust me?"

"I ain't trusting even myself." He looked fearful worried.

"You know that Ryan has seized Holy Cross?"

"This mawning, yes."

"And that Ryan has stolen all their breeding-stock?"

"Yesterday that was."

"And that yo' father dressed himself up as a preacher, and warned Jim?"

"They met up five mile south of Lordsburgh. Yessir."

"And that Balshannon is tied up here?"

"To be butchered this evening. Well?"

"Curly, I want the range wolves to save Balshannon."

"The range wolves has another engagement, seh."

"You know all about this, Curly! Cayn't you trust me to help?"

"We want no help, I reckon."

I turned my tongue loose then, and surely burned young Curly.

"Don't talk so loud, ole Chalkeye, but say some more!" he laughed. "I could set around to listen to you all day. Turn yo' wolf loose, for it's shorely yo' time to howl."

That dried me up cold and sudden, for I had been acting youthful, and Curly had got responsible, maybe elderly with me, the same being ridiculous seeing how small the boy was.

"Yo're through with yo' prayers, Chalkeye? Some comforted, eh? You ole ring-tailed snorter, cayn't you understand? We ain't going to have you mixed up with us range wolves, and branded for an outlaw. We want you to keep good, and be a whole lot respectable right along. Then you can stay around in this man's town, walk in the open with a proud tail, and show the Ryan outfit that Balshannon has one friend who ain't no robber."

Then I understood.

"Now," says Curly, "hear my lil' voice, for I'm goin' to prophesy. You know that Ryan reckons to have young Michael here for Balshannon's funeral? Suppose this Michael don't transpire to-night? Suppose the train comes in with news of a horrible shocking outrage? Suppose them mean, or'nary robbers has stole a millionaire? Suppose—well, just you wait for Ryan's yell when he hears what's done happened to his petted offspring. He'll surely forget there's

any Balshannon to kill. Just you wait peaceful, and when the town turns out to rescue that poor stolen maverick you want to ride in and collect Balshannon."

Opposite in the hotel piazza I watched old Ryan and the City Marshal having a mint julep together at one of the tables.

"You hear that hawss?" says Curly, and far off I heard a horse come thundering. Soon the rider swung into sight, pitching the dust high, until he came abreast of my window, and saw the City Marshal in the piazza.

"Marshal," I heard him calling, "the wire to Bisbee has been cut."

"Is that so?"

"The City Marshal at Bisbee wants your help."

"What's the trouble?"

"You Ryan, your partner Jim Fiskin has been held up on the Mule Pass by robbers. Marshal, the message is for you to bring a posse swift to the nigh end of the pass, so as the Bisbee people can drive the robbers under your guns."

"Good," says the Marshal, belting up his gun, "I'll be thar."

"It would be an awful pity," says Curly behind my shoulder, "if our City Marshal and his posse of men got called away on a false scent, while the wicked robbers up north were stealing a millionaire."

That youngster was wiser than me.

CHAPTER X

STORM GATHERING

IT'S a whole lot interesting to see how different sorts of people put up a fight. Cat, she spits, and proceeds with claws; dog, he says no remarks, but opens up with teeth; horse, he's mighty swift to paw; bull, he hooks; bear, he hugs affectionate while he eats your face; Frenchman, he pokes with a sword; German, he slashes; Spaniard, he throws his knife; nigger, he barbers around with a razor: and all of us have the same feelings to express in some heartfelt sudden way. If you're looking for trouble with Mr. Cowboy, you want to tame yourself and get pretty near absent before he shoots. But at present my mind is set on Britishers, which is a complicated tribe, and they sure fight most various.

When Mr. Britisher is merely feeling good and wants to loose out his joy with a little wholesome scrap, he naturally hates to kill his man first lick—that would spoil future sport. So if he's Irish he turns himself loose with a club, or if he's Scotch or English he feels for the other man with a hard paw. That relieves him, and does no harm. But some-

times he feels real warlike. There's nobody special he wants to kill, his small home tribe has nothing to spare for burial, and yet he must have war. That's why his government keeps proper hunting preserves, well stocked with assorted barbarians over seas. Some of these savages are sure to be wanting a fight, so Mr. Britisher obliges, and comes along hot with rifles and Maxim guns. Savages are plenty, so that if a few get spoilt they'll never be missed. "It's good for them," says Mr. Britisher, "and it saves the crockery from being smashed at home."

So you see how Mr. Britisher may have his peaceful scrapping with another boy, or go play with his savages when they want a licking; but he's serious none — just laughs and shakes hands afterwards. But what does he do when he feels real awful and dangerous? Civilised folk like us Americans, feeling as bad as that, turn loose the guns, and wipe each other out to a finish. Other people may prefer swords or battering-rams, or a tilt with locomotive engines, or cannon loaded with buffalo horns, or dynamite at ten paces; but all that would feel too tame for Mr. Britisher. No, he puts on his war paint—black suit and top hat most hideous—calls on his lawyer in a frantic passion, and goes to law!

Now look, see how these two families, the du Chesnays and the Ryans, went to law. They came of the best fighting-stock on earth; they were

whole-blooded Irish, but they went to law. The du Chesnays turned the Ryans out of their home and country, which was bad. Then the Ryans did worse: lay low and waited bitter hateful years, gathered their strength, and struck from behind—the cowards! Old Ryan got his enemy corrupted with drink and gambling, stole all his cattle, left him helpless to fight, then seized the home to try and turn a dying lady into the desert. He kept within the law, but there was not an honest card in his whole game. It was foul play, and I for one don't blame poor Jim for wanting no more law in the fight with Ryan.

And yet I reckon that after the first fifty miles of his trail that day Jim's main thoughts were about the dinner he didn't have, and by sundown he quit caring who was dead and who was ruined, as he racked on, with aching bones and a played horse. It was nigh dark when he raised the Toughnut Mine at Tombstone against the red of dusk. Around him lay the rolling yellow swell of the hot grass, clumps of scorched cactus, blistered hills of rock; before him the mine-heads and the roofs with sparkling streaks of blue electric lamps. He jockeyed his worn horse past the Jim Crow Mine, and the house where my cousins lived, the Misses Jameson, then on through scattered suburbs, till swinging round the corner into the main street he rolled at a canter for the stable-yard.

Abreast of the Sepulchre saloon he heard his name called, and reined up sharp to speak with the small stable-boy from Ryan's "livery," who came limping out to meet him through the dust.

"Say, kid"—he leaned over in the saddle, well-nigh falling—"where shall I find the Duke?"

The little one-eyed cripple jerked his thumb back at the Sepulchre saloon. "The Dook's in thar," he answered.

Jim rolled from the saddle, dropped his rein to the ground, quit his horse, brushed past the cripple, and went on without a word. He was so stiff he could hardly walk, so dead weary that he reeled against the swing-doors trying to get them open. The cripple helped him, and he staggered in. The place was crowded, but the clash of his spurs along the floor made several punchers turn round lazy, asking him to drink, because he belonged to their tribe. Two of the cowboys grabbed him, but he broke away, and went on.

Beyond the bar on the right were the gambling-tables, each with its crowd of players, and at the third Jim saw Louisiana on a high seat watching for Low-Lived Joe, his partner, who dealt the game. Opposite them he found his father, then pushed his way through the crowd to Balshannon's side. The ivory chips were piled breast high in front of him, for play had been high, and the Dook had had a run of luck.

The boy watched his father's face flushed high with excitement, his feverish eyes, his twitching lips, and restless fingers at play with the round ivory counters which stood for five thousand dollars won since supper-time. Opposite he looked up at Louisiana on the high seat, all bald-faced shirt and diamonds, guarding his stacks of gold coin with a revolver. Low-Lived Joe faced up a card on the deck, and passed some chips to Balshannon. The rest of the players had quit to watch the big game through.

"Father, I want you," says he.

"Well, Jim," says Balshannon, "what's the trouble?" He never looked up.

But the boy was shaking all over. "Father, come, I want you."

The Dook staked, then rolled a cigarette. "Don't bother me, Jim," says he, "you'll spoil the run. We can't do anything, boy, for we've lost those cattle."

"Ryan has seized the ranche, the sheriff's there! Come out!"

Balshannon quivered, but Joe shoved him a pile of blue chips.

"So Santa Cruz is gone?" Balshannon drawled, and doubled his stake. "Well, how's your mother?"

"Dead!"

Balshannon went grey, the cigarette dropped from his fingers. "Dead," he muttered, "dead." Then he

looked up with a sort of queer smile. "Anything else?" he asked quite cheerfully.

"Say, Dook," said Louisiana, "I'd hate to see you struck from not watching yo' game."

"Thanks, Pete." Balshannon staked out the whole of his winnings, then picked up the cigarette, struck a match, and lighted it slowly.

"Come home!" the boy was whispering. "Come home!"

Jim saw the tears rolling down his father's face, and splashing on the chips. "What's the use, my boy?" he said very softly. "Would that bring your mother back?"

"Come home! Come home!"

"I'm winning back our home."

Then Low-Lived Joe drew a card, and as the boy went staggering away a great yell went up. Balshannon was winning back his home.

Jim says he felt sick when he quit his father, cold down the back, and the floor was all aslant and spinning round. Then everything went black, and he dropped.

When he woke up he felt much better, lying flat on the floor with iced water trickling over his face. That little one-eyed cripple was feeding brandy to him.

"Here's luck!" he gulped, "that's all right—where's my hat?"

"Come out," says little Crook, "you need fresh air."

Jim got up, and wriggled loose, because he hated being pawed, then led the way out past the three fiddlers and the wheezing old harmonium to the door. Outside there was clear blue moonlight. "Where's my horse?" says he.

Crook was lighting a cigarette. "Yo' hawss," says he, "is in the stable. He's unsaddled, rubbed down, watered and fed, befo' now. I reckon you want to be watered and fed yo'self."

"No, kid, I'm not feeling proud enough for that."

"Come on, then," says Crook, "and watch me eat. I'm just a lil' wolf inside, and if I cayn't feed I'll howl."

They went to the pie foundry round the corner, and when Jim saw Crook eat he surely got ravenous. They both fed free and severe, then strayed back heavy to the street in front of the Sepulchre saloon.

"Sit on yo' tail," says Crook, "and I'll feed you a cigarette." So they sat down on the sidewalk, and Jim yawned two yards and a quarter at one stretch.

"I cal'late," says Crook, "that yo' goin' to be riding to-night, so I had yo' saddle thrown on my buckskin mare."

"I'll be riding my bed on the sleep-trail."

"Riding a hawss, I reckon"—Crook bent forward, pulling up his boot legs by the tags—"and me too and the Dook. Our hawsses are waiting for us at the back door of this saloon. You understand?"

"I don't," says Jim. "Do you know, youngster, that only this morning I buried my mother, then I rode a hundred miles, and if Arizona freezes over to-night we'll go skating for all I care."

"Say, if the Dook gets shot up to-night will you be a lord?"

Jim laughed sort of patronising because he liked the youngster's cheek. "My father isn't pining for any such thing to-night."

"But suppose he went daid, would you be a lord?"

"I'd be Jim du Chesnay, riding for whatever wages I'm worth. A lord! what's the use of that?"

"But it must be fine!"

"It may be good enough for my father, but he's Irish, and he doesn't know any better. I'm an American."

"But still yu'd be a lord."

"Would my lordship keep my pony from stumbling in front of a stampede of cattle? Would it save my scalp from Apaches, or help my little calves when the mountain lions want meat? Does my blood protect me from rattlesnakes, or Ryans, or skunks?"

"But there's the big land grant yo' people owns over in Ireland."

"It's tied up with entail, whatever that means, and there's no money in it, anyway. My tail in the old country doesn't save me from being galled in the saddle here, and I'm awfully tired."

"Same here, seh. I'm weary some myself. Yo' gun is loaded?"

Jim pawed his revolver. "Yes."

"Take some more," said Crook, and passed over a handful of cartridges to fill Jim's belt. Jim saw that the cripple was armed.

"Why do you talk," says he, "about horses waiting for us, and the need of guns, and father getting killed? What's the trouble, my lad?"

"The trouble is that Ryan has hired that gambling outfit to skin the Dook to-night. There's men standing round to see he don't leave that house alive. Now, look along the street here to the left, across at the Mortuary Hotel. You see old Ryan settin' there?"

"I do."

He's waiting for his son, the millionaire, young Michael. He's due with his private cyar at ten o'clock. If Michael comes—if he comes, I say—his father reckons to bring him over to call on yo' father here at the 'Sepulchre.' That's why the Dook is bein' skinned, and that's why Ryan's men are watching to see he don't escape alive."

"But what does Ryan want? He's got our breeding cattle, he's taken Holy Cross, my mother's gone—we've nothing left to take."

"You have yo' lives, you and the Dook. Ryan and his outfit allow they'll wipe you out when Michael comes."

"Is that all?" Jim laughed. "They're thoughtful and painstaking, anyway. By the way, I don't know that my father and I have been shrieking for help as yet."

"If you were the kind of people to make a big song when yo're hurt, I reckon that we-all would jest leave you squeal."

"And who is we-all? You've acted like a white man to-night, looking after my poor roan and me like a little brother. But why should you care, young chap? I've never seen you before in my life; I don't even know your name."

"My name is Crook; I works at the stable."

"But why should you interfere? You may get hurt. I wouldn't like that, youngster."

"Wall, partner"—Crook shuffled a whole lot nervous—"I got a message for you from the boys. The Dook's had nothing but greasers working for him, and that's rough on us white men, but still he's surely good. He's dead straight, he don't wear no frills, and many a po' puncher, broke, hungry, half daid of thirst, has been treated like a son at Holy Crawss. We don't amount to much—'cept when you want an enemy or a friend—but our tribe is right into this fight a whole heap, for them Ryans is dirt; and if they comes up agin you to-night I expaict there'll be gun-play first."

"Well, kid," said Jim, yawning with a big mouth, "I wish they'd put it off until to-morrow."

"Yo' eyes is like boiled aigs. Try a cigarette to keep you awake."

"Can't we get my father away from this house?"

"Not till the train comes in."

"What's that got to do with me?"

"Ask no more questions—wait."

"You say that Michael Ryan's due at ten?"

"If they lets him come."

"Suppose he comes?"

"Then nothing can save yo' father, nothing on airth."

As he spoke the sharp screech of the engine rang out from behind the curve, and with all its lights aflash the train rolled in.

CHAPTER XI

THE GUN-FIGHT

BEFORE supper that evening a passing traveller carried a letter to my ranche, and when my boys found out that there was going to be trouble in town they surely flirted gravel for fear of arriving too late. I placed them at a convenient saloon, explained my plans, made them swear that they would not stray. Then I went to Curly's room, and lay low, showing no light, but watching the Mortuary Hotel just across the street.

Ryan sat there in his piazza, ruddy and full, broad and bald as a barn, a ripe man with a grey chin beard. Yes, he was a cheery old soul, popular with the crowd, a power in local politics, well qualified on the outside of him for paradise, and in the innards of him for the other place. I covered him with my gun, and wondered where he would go to when he died. I expect he would be craving then for some of that lager beer he sipped so peaceful, and for the palm-leaf fan which he used to brush off the heat.

Away off to the right I could see Jim sitting on the sidewalk in front of the "Sepulchre." Little Crook was

feeding brandy to him, and cigarettes to keep him away from sleep. Then the train came rumbling in, let out a screech, and stopped. It made me laugh to think what a big hurroar there would be presently when the news got wind of that train being held up by robbers, and Mr. Michael Ryan led away captive.

Yet there seemed to be no excitement. The usual buses and buggies came up from the station, the ordinary crowd of loafers, and then our only cab, which crawled to the "Mortuary" to drop one passenger. He was a fat young man, dressed most surprising in a stove-pipe hat, a Jew fur coat, gloves, and a smart valise. If any of our cowboys had happened around, they would have fired a shot for luck to see if he wasn't some new kind of bird, but old Ryan came down the steps with a roar of welcome.

"Michael!" he shouted, "where's your palace car? Have you sunk so low as to come in a mere cab? Oh, Mike!"

I could hear Mr. Michael explaining that something was wrong with the car, so he'd had to leave her at Lordsburgh for repairs. Of course, the robbers, not seeing the private car, had concluded that their prey had failed to arrive and the train was not worth attacking.

Now Michael had arrived, and after a talk and a drink with his father, these two would stroll over to finish the family vengeance on poor Balshannon. As

far as we had missed getting help from the range wolves, so matters were getting mighty serious.

I slipped away to my men.

"Boys," says I, "we got to play at robbers to-night, I reckon, but I don't want you-all to get recognised. We may be bucking up against the law, and get ourselves disliked if we ain't cautious." So I took a big black silk handkerchief and cut it up into strips. "When the shooting begins," says I, "just you tie these round your heads to hide yo' homely faces. Now get yo' horses and come swift."

I posted the three in the small alley which ran between the "Sepulchre" saloon and the post office beyond it. Then I went out to guard Balshannon. Being naturally a timid and cautious man, I had a brace of revolvers belted on ready for trouble.

Meanwhile young Crook in the front of the house was sitting all doubled up with grief at the sight of Michael Ryan.

"Boy," says Jim, "what's the matter?"

"Nothin'."

"How is it, young un, that you know all about my father's affairs and mine?"

"I expaict," says that one-eyed cripple, "that working my job at the livery I'd oughter know what comes and goes around heah."

"Is that why you're there—to watch?"

Crook went white at that. "You're dreaming," says he, very faint.

"And you're lending me the buckskin running mare for to-night. I've heard of that mare. Is that the sort of thing to lend to a stranger?"

"Well, seh, even a hired man may have his private feelings."

"Look here, youngster, I've seen you before, and I remember you now. When I saw you once at Holy Cross you had two eyes in your head, and you weren't a cripple."

Suddenly Jim snatched away the black pad which was slung over Crook's disabled eye. Two good eyes shone out, and over one of them the scar of an old wound. Jim laughed at that, but Crook forgot to be lame, starting back lithe as a panther and his face dead white.

"Be careful!" he whispered, "there's men passing us! My life ain't worth a cent if I'm seen heah in town." He had the sling across his eye again and broke out laughing. "I mean the doctor says I got to keep it covered, or I'll go blind—and a blind man's life ain't worth one cent in the dollar."

"Quit lying! You're posted at the stable to see who comes and goes, one eye in a sling and one game leg for disguise. Come here!"

Jim dragged him by the scruff of the neck to the post office, which stood next door to the saloon, with only the alley between, and there was an old poster notice on the wall:—

"NOTICE.

"The Northern Pacific and Wells Fargo Express Companies offer ($2,000) two thousand dollars,

DEAD OR ALIVE,

for the four robbers who held up the Northern Pacific Express train at Gold Creek, Deer Lodge County, Montana, on the morning of April 3rd, 1899. Descriptions :—

"Peter, *alias* Bobby Stark, *alias* Curly McCalmont, supposed to be son of Captain McCalmont, is five feet six inches in height, slim, fair hair, blue eyes, clean-shaven, soft girlish manner, with a scar over left eye, the result of a knife wound. He is about twenty years of age, but looks not more than fifteen, and was formerly a cowboy, riding for the Holy Cross Outfit in Arizona. He was last seen on or about May 5th, at Clay Flat, in the Painted Desert, with a flea-bitten grey gelding branded $\widehat{\times}$ on the near stifle, and two led burros, one of them packed."

Jim turned round sharp on Crook. "You're Curly McCalmont!" says he.

"Come away—yo' risking my neck."

"Do you think I'd sell you for that dirty money?"

"What you seen, others may, and they'd act haid-strong."

"All right, Curly. Don't you forget to walk lame."

"Hist! Heah come the Ryans!"

The two youngsters came hurrying into the saloon, where I stood watching Balshannon while he lost the last of his money. Jim clutched me by the arm, whispering something, but I did not catch what he said, for Curly was making a last play to get Balshannon from the tables.

"You quit," said he, "befo' yo're too late, patrone."

"It's too late now," says Balshannon; "what's the good?"

"It's not too late to save yo' life. Come quick!"

"So," says Balshannon, looking up sort of surprised, "you think you can er—*frighten* me?"

Louisiana was leaning forward across the table. "Look a-here, Crook," says he, "you can play, or you can get right out, but you don't interrupt this game." And Curly was hustled aside by Ryan's watchers.

"Now, Joe," the patrone was saying, "let's finish this."

He staked his last chips and lost, then got up with a little sigh, thinking, I reckon, of his wife, his ranche, his cattle.

"I'm kind of sorry, Dook," says Louisiana.

"So am I, a little," Balshannon chuckled.

"I think," says the gambler, stacking away his great big heaps of gold and silver coin—"I think that——"

"You are fortunate, Pete," Balshannon answered lightly, "I dare not think."

"I'm closing the game for to-night," says Louisiana.

"I'm closing the game to-night," says Lord Balshannon.

He took a cigarette-case from his pocket, but found it empty, felt in his shabby old clothes for money, then turned away with a queer little laugh of his which made me ache.

Outside in the street I heard a hand-bell clang, and took notice through the tail of my eye that the room was filling with all the worst men in that bad town of ours. There was the Alabama Kid, and beside him Shorty Broach, stage robber and thug, Beef Jones, the horse-thief, Gas, a tin-horn crook, Thimble-Rig Phipps, and two or three other sure-thing gamblers, rollers, and thugs. I went over to the front end of the house, where the orchestra were packing up to quit, and there at the far corner of the bar were old Ryan and Michael standing drinks to the crowd. Yes, the game was being set sure enough. I saw Low-Lived Joe hurry past me and speak in a whisper to Ryan, and at that Balshannon's enemy stood out to the front of his gang. All the scrubs and skin-game men were drifting into that corner behind him, until there must have been perhaps thirty gathered, loosing their guns to be ready.

By the faro tables were Jim and Curly trying to get Balshannon out of the house, but he broke away, and they followed until he came to the inner end

of the bar. Then they stood back a little, while he waited to be served.

"Here, Bill!" he called out cheerfully.

A bar-keep quit the Ryans and went to serve him. "Well," says he, heaps insolent, "what do you want?"

The patrone looked at him smiling. "You seem out of sorts, Bill; have a drink with me. I'll take a whisky."

The bar-keep glared at him.

"Oh, by the way," says Balshannon, "I'll have to square up for this to-morrow morning."

"Terms cash," says the bar-keep.

"Really?" Balshannon smiled at his ugly face. "Oh, of course—your orders, eh? Well, never mind. You're so polite, Bill, that—er—that just by way of thanks I'll ask you to accept this little token." He chucked him the silver cigarette-case and turned away from the bar.

But I was bull-roaring mad. "Patrone," says I, "patrone, I owe you heaps of money. Here, take this!"

But Balshannon laid both his hands upon my shoulders, smiling right into my eyes. "Dear friend," he said, "you know I could not take money, even from you."

A thick voice was calling from the other end of the bar: "Here, bar-keep, you give this man a drink!"

Then the patrone looked round. "Ah, Ryan, eh?" He walked straight up to his enemy. "I'll

drink with you gladly, Ryan. Suppose we forget the past, and try to be good—er—friends, eh?" He held out his hand, but Ryan took no notice. "Hello, I see your son is with you, Ryan. Good evening, Michael."

Michael just stared at him.

The people who had no interest in the trouble must have seen drawn guns before now, because I heard them breaking rapid for cover. The scrub which belonged to Ryan was formed up behind him for war, while back of Balshannon stood only Jim and Curly with the whole rear part of the room behind them empty. The two youngsters seemed to be having baby troubles, for Curly was struggling powerful to break away from Jim.

"I got to," he shouted, "I cayn't see to shoot!" Then he jumped clear. He had disremembered about being a cripple, he had torn the bandage away from his eye, and over the left brow, clear for all men to see, was his brand, the knife wound! At that a yell went up from Ryan's crowd, and some of his men surged forward, Louisiana and Low-Lived Joe in the lead.

I jumped straight at them with my brace of guns.

"Back!" shouted Ryan, holding them back with both arms. "Back! What's your hurry? Wait!"

"Come on!" came Curly's clear, high yell. "Two thousand dollars daid or alive if you take me! I'm a sure wolf, and it's my night to howl, you cowards!

I'm Curly McCalmont of the Robbers' Roost! Take me who can!"

Curly had gone plumb crazy, throwing his life away to get Balshannon one more chance of escape, but the crooks only saw that the small boy's team of guns were quick in his hands to shoot, and felt real glad of Ryan's outstretched arms. So came the lull, and I heard the bar-keep clashing down bottle and glass beside Balshannon.

"Whisky," says he in a shaky voice, "and yours, Mr. Ryan?"

"Irish," said Ryan, then whispered to his son, who hauled clumsy, getting out his silver-plated pop-shooter, a thing more fit for a girl than a grown man.

I like to think of my old patrone in those last moments of his life, as he stood at the end of the bar, quite peaceful, facing Ryan. He was a tall, straight man, gaunt some, dead weary, but the only clean thing in sight. The grey moustache raked up against the red tan of his face, his hair was curling silver, his eyes cool blue. He seemed to be amused with the Ryans, and as to weapons, he just despised a gun. Then he heard the clash of his son's spurs just behind him. "Good-bye," I heard him whisper. "God bless you, Jim."

I reckon Jim was crying.

Ryan had swung forward along the bar, and reached for Balshannon's empty glass. "Here, take your drink," he shouted, "the drink you begged for!"

Balshannon stepped aside while Ryan filled the glass for him to drink. "Thank you," he said. But Ryan snatched the full glass, jumped back, swung out his arm—"Take that!" he yelled, and threw the glass straight at Balshannon's face.

The patrone took a handkerchief and wiped his face, slow and dainty, but the blood was starting where the glass had struck. "I'm sorry," he said, "that it should come to this, but as you are not in condition, Mr. Ryan, to fight, I must ask you, Mr. Michael Ryan, to oblige me."

"Fight?" yelled Ryan. "Fight a thing like you? Not much! Back, Michael! My Lord Balshannon," he sneered, "do you think my son would demean himself to fight you?"

"I observe," said Balshannon kindly, "that he seems to be rather warm in that fur overcoat."

The crowd broke out laughing, half ready, I felt then, to take the weaker side against a coward. The patrone was so surely great, so much a man, so helpless—death in his eyes, peace on his smiling lips; and the Ryans in furs and jewellery looked such curs.

I had stepped back against the wall, facing the middle of the bar. On the right was the Ryan gang, on the left Balshannon, behind me the row of windows which looked on the alley-way where my men lay hid. I rapped soft with my knuckles on the window just at my right hand.

"Say, Chalkeye!" Louisiana was hailing me.

"Why don't you stand by the Dook? Have you gone back on the Dook?"

"I stand here, Pete," said I, "to see fair play."

Then Ryan broke in on me.

"Boys," he said, "we don't need Chalkeye Davies to judge our play. You know me, all of you; you know my record, and what I've done for our city. I've not asked you here, citizens, to see murder, or fighting of any sort, but to witness an act of justice done by this Lord Balshannon on himself."

The crowd kept still, remembering that our leading citizen had acted straight for our city, and had a right to be heard.

"Now you shall judge as citizens," said Ryan, "between this man and me. For a thousand years my people, the Ryans, had land and homes in Oireland, until the Balshannons came over with bloody Cromwell to steal our little holdings by force of ar-r-ms. We were overpowered, we were forced to pay rent to the tyrants, but we were free men, not slaves; we are free men to day, and we have fought for liberty.

"Look at this last Balshannon, this man who once tried to get me hung on a false charge, this cowardly, brutal ruffian, who drove me and all my people out of our homes to die in the bitter cold. Think of our women starving to death in the snowdrifts—and, if you doubt me, go and ask me wife. We were driven, she and I, and all our people, out of the land we

loved, out of Erin, beggared, hopeless, despairing exiles. Out on the black Atlantic we had to bury one of my little children in the sea—there stands the murderer! Do you blame me, citizens, for wanting vengeance?"

"Dook," says the Alabama Kid, "suppose we hear your side?"

"You'll hear my side," says Lord Balshannon, "from Ryan. This is his court of—er—justice." Then he wiped the running blood from his cheek, and yawned behind his hand. Even Ryan's men began to look ashamed of such a court.

"Vengeance!" Ryan was howling; "vengeance with the Apaches first—I turned them loose on your camp! Vengeance with McCalmont's robbers—I turned them loose on your ranche!"

Balshannon swung half round and grasped Curly McCalmont's hand. We saw his back shaking with laughter, but when he faced Ryan again he straightened his lips. "Excuse me," he said, "go on."

But the crowd remembered how McCalmont's wolves had breakfasted with Ryan after that little dinner at Holy Cross. They howled with laughter.

"You may laugh!" yelled Ryan; "laugh, you hounds!" but Balshannon lifted his hand, and the crowd were silent.

"Yes, I failed," said Ryan. "I had to wait—I waited—but what I couldn't do you did for yourself; yes, you, Balshannon, drinking and gambling here

while your forsaken wife lay dying yonder! I had only to find a few friends to lend you me money, and sharpers to be after rooking you of all you borrowed. Yes, that was me vengeance; can you say that failed? Where is your big estate? Where are your cattle? Where is your wife?"

Balshannon's face had gone dead with pain, but he never flinched.

"And now," Ryan shouted at him, "you beggared gambler, you broken, shaking drunkard, you shall finish this vengeance on yourself, which you began, which needs no hand of mine! Here!" He ran forward, and jammed a long knife into Balshannon's hand. "Finish! Kill yourself, and have done, for shure an' you're not fit to live, ye filthy beast!"

Balshannon was reeling, faint, sick, clinging to the bar for support.

"Boys!" I shouted, "if Ryan's a man, let him fight. Stand aside, give him room, give him a gun. Patrone, take this gun!" I jumped to his side, jammed one of my revolvers into his hand, then leapt back to my place by the wall. Ryan's tin-horn pets had deserted him; even his son, scared to death, had slunk away.

"Help!" Ryan was screaming. "Murther!" But a gun was thrust into his hand, and his own hired thugs shoved him forward to fight Balshannon.

"When I call 'Three!'" I shouted, and saw Balshannon stand like a man, cool, steady.

"One, two, three!"

Ryan fired and missed before my second call, but at the "Three" Balshannon's gun blazed out. I saw a little black hole between Ryan's eyes, and he fell forward all in a heap, stone dead.

I reckon that for years I'd been heaps virtuous keeping my quick gun off Balshannon's meat, so now I was full of joy because the patrone had finished up all the unpleasantness and made peace without loss or damage. No grown responsible man had any quarrel left.

But then my youngsters weren't grown up a bit, nor responsible, nor anything else, but rattled with a gun-fight too rich for their blood. Curly was scared all to pieces, Jim was right off his head, and as to my three kids outside the window, they had no sense anyways at their best. I ought to have thought of that before; it was too late now.

What matter if young Michael eased his feelings by emptying off his toy at the patrone? His pellets chipped the ceiling, and did him credit for a pious son, but only got a laugh from Balshannon. Michael just went on popping ostentatious, so Balshannon showed he bore no malice by throwing his own gun on the bar. Then somebody called out for drinks as a sign of peace.

But Jim only saw his father being attacked, and he surely never had a sense of humour. He turned his wolf-howl loose, and broke his gun-arm free from

Curly's hold, then started splashing lead at Michael Ryan. I saw some fur fly off from the Jew coat, and the next shot dispersed young Michael's hat, but the third struck Low-Lived Joe full on the shoulder.

Then there was surely war, for Louisiana loved that Joe more than anything else on earth, and all his friends lashed out their guns. Curly knelt quick below the blast of lead, and Jim leapt sudden behind the end of the bar, but in a blaze of flame and rolling smoke I saw Balshannon clutch both hands to his heart, then swing half round and fall.

It must have been then that poor Curly fired the two shots which killed Louisiana and Beef Jones, the horse thief. It must have been then that the window close beside me fell with a crash of glass upon the floor, and my three men, all masked, with guns and rifles poured red-hot slaughter into the Ryan crowd. That was bad, but I felt grateful then, while one by one I shot out the swinging lamps which lit the smoke. There were five, making so many shades of deeper gloom, and then dead blackness pierced by flaming guns, and at the end of that silence, with a patter of running feet, the groan of a dying man.

CHAPTER XII

THE CITY BOILING OVER

ONCE I remember seeing an old bear roped in the desert by cowboys, and dragged by the scruff of his neck into the fierce electric glare of a Western city. Some female tourists said he looked dreadful rough, a school ma'am squealed out he was dangerous, a preacher allowed he was savage, but nobody made excuses for that old bear. Now I reckon that I'm just like Mr. Bear, dragged sudden off the range into the indecent light of civilisation. Nobody is going to make allowances for me if I look dreadful rough, and savage, and dangerous. I own up I've no excuse. Bear and I were raised outside the prickly fences of your laws, beyond the shelter of your respectable customs, exposed to all the heat and cold, the light and darkness, the good and the bad of life. Bear, he has teeth and claws, as I have horse and gun ; but both of us fight or go dead, for that is our business. If you're shocked, quit reading ; but if you want more, read on.

When I knew that Balshannon was due to be shot I set a trap, and all the desperadoes at Tombstone

walked right into it. I had the men picked out who would make a good loss, sent out the invitations to them in Ryan's name, and had a hand-bell clanged to call them in for the ceremonies. If Ryan only played fair there would be no killing, but if he acted foul there was going to be a sure enough massacre. Why, it was only right that on the death of a great chief like Balshannon servants should go with him to the other world. That was all known to my three masked men in ambush, and when Ryan acted foul he was sent with Louisiana, Beef Jones, and four others, all desperadoes, to wait upon Balshannon—beyond the flames and smoke of his funeral honours.

For a naturally cautious and timid man I took fool risks in exposing Curly to that danger; but honest range-raised fighters are more than a match for the drunken town swabs who had to be dispersed. Besides, my youngsters were not the kind to stay put in a place of safety. After the fight, if there was one, I knew that the fire-bell would call up the whole of the citizens, and the news would spread swifter than flames, of masked robbers attacking a saloon right in the middle of their peaceful town. They would be displeased, and rather apt to send in their little account to me, which made me blush to think of, because I lay myself out to be a modest man.

When I got through with shooting out all the lights my men quit firing to haul me through the

window. Now all four of us were in the alley-way, between the saloon and the post office, barred off from the main street by a high gate, while our line of escape was open to the rear. Being shy of recognition, I tied on a mask, and reloaded my gun, planning the next move rapid in my head. Then I called off my men to the tail end of the house, posting one to kill anybody who tried to get out by my window. I was scheming a raid into the house to rescue Curly and Jim, but just for a moment my riders hung back scared.

"Come along, you tigers!" says I, but there was no need to risk our lives, for through the black silence of the house came a sudden blaze of guns and rush of men. Curly and Jim had broken cover at last, so we had only to let them come, rolling out head over heels in no end of a hurry. As soon as they were clear we handed in lead to the crowd, stampeded them, and sprinkled their tails. They were surely discouraged.

The next thing was to mount our horses and reload guns while we rode off slow. Jim was shaking all over, Curly was sobbing aloud, Monte, one of my boys, was groaning because a bullet had burned his cheek, Ute breathing like a gone horse, and Custer making little yelps of joy—all of us scary as cats with our nerves on the jump, the same being natural after a red-hot fight. We pulled out by the south end of the city.

"Now," said I, "you, Curly, and you, Jim, light out ahead and keep a-flying for old Mexico."

Curly howled, "We ain't goin' to leave you!"

I had to make my meaning quick and plain before he knew I was earnest. As to Jim, I cut his words dead short—and so they quit me streaking off to the south.

"Now, you-all!" I turned to my tigers.

Custer let out his yelp, and Ute grinned ugly, and both of them thought all the world of me for getting them into trouble.

"Monte," says I, "go home and fix that wound."

He circled off.

"Well," says I, "if you other two play any more tiger to-night, I'll rip your livers out. You got to be plumb good citizens, 'cause them people in the 'Sepulchre' have seen about ten masked robbers, which they'll surely hunt. So off with them masks quick," and I threw mine in the road.

"Now," says I, "we'll see if the general public is going to help us to get them robbers and kill them."

So we three trotted grave and innocent up Main Street, where scores of citizens were saddling, mounting, and gathering, the swift men calling the laggards. In the lead rode Deputy-Marshal Pedersen, coming on rapid.

"Hello," he called, "you, Chalkeye!"

I swung in beside him. "What's the delay?" says I.

"How many robbers?"

"Ten masked men, come on! They're McCalmont's gang."

Custer and Ute were calling the rest to hustle. "Ten masked robbers," they shouted, "heading down for Naco!"

"Thought you was in the 'Sepulchre'!" says Pedersen.

"I was till I'd shot out the lights," says I; "them crazy idiots there were handing out lead at me."

"Where did you see them robbers?"

"In the back street. They wounded my boy Monte, so I had to send him home. Say, look at that!"

Ahead on the white road, plain in the moonlight, lay something black, so I swung down my arm in passing, and took a grab. "What d'ye make of this, eh, Pedersen?"

"A silk mask," says he. "Thanks, Chalkeye—you've got us on the right trail, anyways."

"But watch these tracks," say I; "look there—they're quitting the main road—swing out!"

Curly and Jim had struck straight south down the road, so I pointed the whole pursuit well off to the right, south-west for Naco, and made believe I saw another mask among the stones. If dangerous robbers were hard to see through the moonshine, that was no fault of mine. If the citizens wanted to go riding out by moonlight, I surely gave them heaps good exercise.

Meanwhile that Curly was herding Jim down towards the Mexican boundary; but both the lads were rattled, and their nerves had gone all to smash. Jim had dumb yearnings to go back and eat up citizens, Curly was trying to cry with one lip while he laughed with the other. Then Jim told Curly not to be a coward, and Curly laughed with the tears rolling down his face.

"I wisht I was daid," he howled, "I wisht I was daid. I done murdered Beef Jones, and there's his ole hawss a-waiting to take him home. He loved that hawss."

"And you a robber!" says Jim, mighty scornful. Jim had only courage, a thing which is usual to all sorts of men and beasts, but Curly had something bigger—brains, judgment, the lion heart, the eagle sight, the woman gentleness, a child's own innocence, and heaven's unselfishness.

"I'm a sure coward," he sobbed.

"Brace up, youngster. I saw you kill both Beef and Louisiana, but now you're gone all rotten."

"Between the eyes, I got Pete between the eyes! I seen his eyes goin' up all white—the hole between —oh, how I wisht I was daid!"

"Poor little beggar! And one would think this was the first time you'd ever seen a gun-fight."

"I never seen one, never until now."

"And you McCalmont's son!"

"You needn't let on to him that y'u seen me—

human. Wall," he braced himself up, "I'm only a range wolf, so what's the odds, Jim?"

"Well, what's wrong now?"

"Do you know you're outlawed too? Old Chalk-eye masked his riders, he played robbers, I showed wolf, and you're done branded with the range wolves now."

Jim swung round in the saddle, looking back at Tombstone, a bad sample surely among cities, but still entitled to wave Old Glory high, the flag of honest men, of civilisation.

He set his teeth and swung to his trail again.

"If honesty is *that*," says he determinedly, "I'll herd with thieves."

"I don't like the smell of this trail," says Curly, "none. The City Marshal is riding up from Bisbee with his posse. Let's strike west, then circle the town, then north, to father's camp."

"Come on," says Jim, and swung his horse to the west along a small dead trail.

"We got to change ourselves," says McCalmont's son, and began to loose some parcels tied by the strings to his saddle. "I got some clothes for we-all. Here," he passed over an old leather jacket, a straw sombrero, and a bottle. "That's cawffee extract," says he, "mixed with a black drug. I boiled it strong. You rub it over yo' face and neck and paws, then rig yo'self."

Our people, at any gait in the saddle, are broke

to eat dinner, drink from a bottle, roll a cigarette, or sing a song without being jarred up like a tenderfoot. So while they trotted slow Jim stained his hide all black like a greaser *vaquero*, then slung on the *charro* clothes of a poor Mexican cowboy.

"Now," says Curly, "you take this moustache and lick the gummy side, stick it on yo' lip, and remember yo're a Dago. Say, pull up, they'll know that buckskin mare of mine for sure. There ain't another in the United States I reckon with white points like her'n. You empty that bottle, and black her white stockings, quick."

Curly was changing too, for he pulled up the legs of his overalls, then wriggled them down over his long boots. Then he took Jim's cowboy hat, and slouched the brim down front like a hayseed boy. He put on a raggy old jacket, and bulged his lean cheeks out with pads of wool. He looked a farm boy, and when they rode on, sat like a sack of oats.

"It won't work," says Jim; "here's a big outfit of people sweeping right down from the north. Our horses are blown, and their snorting will give us away."

"Dot vash all righd," says Curly.

"That wouldn't pass for German," says Jim, "not even in a fog."

"Shure," says Curly, "is it me forgettin' me nativity? Amn't I Oirish?"

They had entered the Naco trail by this, and were walking their horses up the hill for Tombstone. If the silly kids had obeyed my orders we should never have seen a hair of them that night. As it was, Deputy-Marshal Pedersen and I came with full thirty men on top of them.

I don't profess I knew either the Irish hayseed boy or the *vaquero*, until the black horse, a melancholy plug called Jones which I'd lent Curly, began to whicker to the grey mare I rode. Pedersen, too, was mortal suspicious of that buckskin mare with Jim.

"Black points," says he. "That's so—Crook's had white laigs."

"Shure," says Curly, prompt, "an' is it thim robbers ye'd be afther hunting?"

Pedersen reined up.

"They've passed you, eh?" he called.

"Didn't they shoot me," says Curly, "till I'm kilt entoirely? There was elivan av thim agin' me and the young feller that was along with me, the rapscallions, and thim with black masks on their dirthy faces!"

"How long since?"

"Three minutes gone, yer 'anner; and can any of yez tell me if this is the road to Misther Chalkoye Davies?"

Pedersen had spurred on, and we swept after him, leaving Mr. Curly McCalmont howling Irish curses

because we hadn't pointed him on his trail to Las Salinas.

We were scarcely gone when a second outfit of five stragglers came rolling down the trail, headed by Shorty Broach, one of the men who had been hurt that night in the gun-fight. He always hated Balshannon's folks worse than snakes; he was heaps eager now for Curly McCalmont's blood, and the two thousand dollars which went along with it. But worse than that, this Shorty was a sure plainsman, who never forgot a horse. Still he went past with his crowd before he saw anything wrong with that black horse I'd lent, or the buckskin mare Jim was riding. Then he swung.

"Hold on, boys! Say, I knows that buckskin. That's Crook's buckskin mare at the livery—here's Curly McCalmont's mare!"

The riders tried to call Shorty off, told him to soak his head, remembered that Crook's buckskin had white stockings, whereas this mare's points were black, which made all the difference.

"Them horses is blown, they've run full hard," says Broach; "they've been surely chased, and I'm due to inquire more."

On that the riders began to circle around, while Curly slung out Irish by the yard about running away from the robbers.

"Shure," says he, "and it's the Chief of the Po-lice no less we're talkin' wid."

"Throw up your hands!" says Broach, pointing his gun on Jim, but the youngster was busy rolling a cigarette.

"Why is that gringo showing off with a gun?" he asked in Spanish. "He looks so foolish, too!"

"You got to account for that buckskin mare," says Broach, but Jim set in the cool moonlight and lit his cigarette, taking no notice.

"This greaser is lately an orphan, sorr," says Curly, "an' he's only goin' innocent for a dhrunk in Tombstone—maning no harr-m at all."

"Where did he get that buckskin?"

"It's the 'pitchfork' mare ye'll be maning, sorr?"

At last Jim knew the brand on the mare he was riding.

"Indade," says Curly, "hasn't she got an Holy Crawss brand on the shoulder as well, sorr? Maybe he stole her there."

"If you want to live, Mr. Greaser, you'll account for that buckskin mare," Broach threatened again with his gun.

"I understand," says Jim in Spanish, puffing his cigarette at Shorty's face. "I took this mare in trade at la Morita Custom House on the Line. A Vaquero Americano could not pay the hundred per cent. duty on his horse, so I traded with him my Mexican-branded mustang to oblige, taking this mare. She's branded 'Holy Cross,' rebranded 'pitchfork.' Perhaps the gentlemen will stand aside—I have explained."

"All very well," said Broach in Spanish, which sounded rough like a railroad accident, "how do you account for that saddle, Jim du Chesnay's silver-mounted saddle?"

"Si señor, the saddle of my young lord el Señor Don Sant Iago, of Holy Cross. The caballero ordered me to bring these, that he might play bear before the house of a beautiful lady in Tombstone."

"And your own saddle?"

"Alas! I played poker with the Americanos. They have skinned me." Jim made a little flourish, twisting the moustache. It came off in his fingers!

And with a howl the whole crowd closed in. They had captured Jim du Chesnay and Curly McCalmont!

CHAPTER XIII

THE MAN-HUNT

I RECKON that civilised folks are trained to run in a rut, to live by rule, to do what's expected. If they're chased they'll run, if they're caught they surrender. That's the proper thing to do.

Our plainsman, he's a much resourceful animal: he never runs in the rut, and he always does exactly what's not expected. Here were Jim and Curly surrounded by five men all hot for war. Broach could shoot good, but his horse was a plumb idiot when it came to firing. He was scared he would miss Jim, and get the counter-jumper who pranced around behind. Of the rest, one was a railroad man, and useless at that, one was a carpenter, and one was a barber—all of them bad shots. Still, they knew that their prisoners could neither fight nor run.

The prisoners did both most sudden, and heaps surprising. While Jim's moustache was dropping, Curly's first bullet got Broach's horse in the eye, sending him backwards over on top of the man. Jim unhorsed the railroad man, the carpenter disabled the barber, and the counter-jumper bolted.

That posse was all demoralised, shooting liberal, attracting heaps of attention. So another belated outfit of citizens came whooping down the road, while at the first sound of battle, the crowd I was with swung round at full gallop to share the play. I knew my youngsters were in foul bad luck.

Yet in a single evening these two had got to feeling each other's thoughts, acting together without talk, partners like the hands of a man. They knew that for them it was death to show on the skyline, sure good scouting to jump for the lowest ground, and keep the dust a-rolling to hide their movements. They struck a gulley, and Jim led over rock and cactus, riding slack rein, trusting that buckskin mare. After the first five minutes, looking round, he saw the belated outfit along the skyline following, and heard the whoops of our crowd closing in on the left.

"I reckon," says Curly, "they'll get us."

"Very awkward," says Jim.

Say, Curly," he called out, "there's a fence here somewhere on Chalkeye's pasture. It's broken where it cuts this arroyo, but just 'ware wire! Here! 'Ware wire!"

The mare took a stumble, but cleared the fallen wire. The black horse just jumped high. Up on the plain above the pursuit was going to be checked by my standing fence.

"We're plumb in luck to the lips," says Curly.

And now the rocky hollow widened out, the trail

was smooth, the pace tremendous. While our citizens behind were having a check betwixt rock and wire, Jim struck the further gate of my pasture, and held it wide for Curly. Horsemanship had given the partners a mile of gain, but now, on level ground, where any fool could ride, our posse gained rapidly, for the youngsters had to go moderate and save their horses.

"Down on yo' hawss," says Curly, "you ride too proud," and a spatter of blue lead made Jim lie humble. The fool gallopers were right handy for war, when sudden the winding valley poured out its fan of débris upon the lower plain towards Mexico. Here just below the mouth of the arroyo a railroad track swung right across the trail on a high embankment. On the nigh side of the embankment ran a waggon trail, climbing a hill on the left to cross the track, and that was sure foul luck for Jim and Curly, for now they rode out clear against the sky in a storm of lead, and began to reckon they was due at the big front door of heaven. Jim was all right in a moment, for the buckskin mare just rose to the occasion, leapt the rails, and got to cover down the bank beyond; but Curly's horse was an idiot. At the sight of the gleaming rails, he stopped dead to show himself off, shied, bucked, pawed the full moon, fell in heaps, tumbled all over himself, dug a hole in the ground with his nose, and timed the whole exhibition to get Curly shot. The gallopers were right

on to him before he chose to proceed, with flanks spurred bloody, down the further bank.

Jim circled back to the rescue. "Hurt?" he called.

Curly lay all of a heap on the saddle. "Shoot!" he howled, and flashed on across the plain.

Jim got the gallopers stark against the sky at point-blank range, and just whirled in for battle, piling the track with dead and dying horses, blocking the passage complete. Then he streaked away to see if Curly had gone dead on Jones' back.

Five minutes after that, Deputy-Marshal Pedersen and I came blundering into the wreckage. He jumped through somehow, leading eighteen men, but I stopped to help a hurt man, and used his rifle to splint his broken leg. The fool gallopers were mostly wrung out, and gone home, or left afoot by Jim. The good stayers were on ahead, but weary maybe, it being late for pleasuring. So I proceeded to have an attack of robbers all to myself, with the wounded man's revolver and my own, shooting promiscuous. Sure enough, half a dozen of them bold pursuers came circling back to find out what was wrong.

When I had turned back with my idiots for home, a ripple spread along the grass, an air from the south, then a lifting wind, full strong, steady as ice aflow, cold as the wings of Death. Jim fought up wind, battling at full gallop until he overtook the little partner, then ranged abreast and steadied knee to

knee, nursing his mare at a trot. The moon slid down flame-red behind the hills, the wind blew a gale, the night went black, the sky a sheet of stars.

Jim had quit being tired, for his body was all gone numb and dead, so he felt nothing except the throb of hoofs astern. Then he heard a popping of guns faint in the rear, and on that saw flashes of signal firing away on the right, besides other gun-flames back below Mule Pass. He held his teeth from chattering to speak.

"Curly, old chap, they've wired for a posse up from Naco, and the City Marshal's men are coming down from Bisbee. They're closing in on three sides, and we can't escape."

Curly said nothing.

"Say, Curly, you're not hurt?"

"Mosquito bite," said Curly; "look ahere, Jim. If anything goes wrong, you'll find the captain at La Soledad to-morrow."

"What captain?"

"My father. I made him swear he'd wait. How's yo' buckskin?"

"Flagging."

"She'll live through all right. Don't you talk any mo'."

"You're losing hope?"

"There's allus hope," said Curly, "but them stars seem nearer to we-all."

They were riding through greasewood bushes and long grass, whilst here and there stood scattered trees of mesquite. That made bad going for horses, but, when they swung aside for better ground, they nearly blundered into an arroyo.

Only the dawn grey saved my boys from breaking both their necks in that deep gap, but now they had got to lose the sheltering darkness, their horses were mighty near finished, and three big outfits of riders were closing down all round them. Jim looked up the sky to see if there were miracles a-coming, for nothing less was going to be much use. Then the Naco people came whirling down on the right, and the black arroyo lay broad across their hopes, so they swung north to look for a crossing, and were thrown right out of the hunt.

Presently soon my youngsters had another big stroke of luck, because the Bisbee crowd missed aim, and had to swing in behind with the men from Tombstone.

"Jim," says Curly, "has they closed in yet?"

"Our wind is covering all three outfits now."

Then came a yell from behind, for in the dawn the hunters had caught sight of their meat.

Now close ahead loomed something white like a ghost, and Jim let out a screech as it reared up against him sudden. As he shied wide and spurred, he saw the ghost some better—a limewashed monument, the boundary mark of old Mexico.

"Saved!" he yelled. "They can't follow beyond the Line."

"They cayn't, but they will," says Curly; "fire the grass!"

Jim grabbed a hair from the buckskin's mane, took matches from his wallets and bound them into a torch, struck a light to the tip, and held it in his paws against the roaring wind. Then he made shift to swing himself down till the long grass brushed his fingers. He dropped his torch beside a greasewood bush, and cantered on with Curly knee to knee. That flicker in the long grass grew to a blazing star, spread with the flaws of the wind, swayed its small tongues to lick new clumps and pass the word to others just beyond. The bush blazed up with a roar as only greasewood can, and flung its burning sticks upon the storm, so that the fire spread swift as a man could run over acres of greasewood. To the east was mesquite bush, which burns like gun-cotton in a gale of wind. But now the draught of the fire had made that gale a scarlet hurricane with the stride of a running horse, which flushed the flying cloud wrack overhead, and made red day along the mountain flanks.

I reckon that if I'd happened with that outfit of hunters, I should have known enough to bear east and circle round the blaze without loss of time; but the leaders saw the burning mesquite grove, and tried to swing west of trouble. There the arroyo

barred them, and before they won to the other hor
of the fire their horses had gone loco, refusing to fac
the heat. Anyways, they stampeded with their riders
and I reckon those warriors never stopped to look
back until they had thrown themselves safe beyond
the railroad. If they had come out for a man-hunt
they got that liberal and profuse beyond their wildest
dreams.

"THEY STAMPEDED"

CHAPTER XIV

THE FRONTIER GUARDS

WELL up to windward of the range fire, that fool horse Jones came to a finish sudden all a-straddle, swaying, nose down, and blood a-dripping. So far Curly had just stayed in the saddle from force of habit, but when the usual motion stopped between his knees he surely forgot to be alive any more, and dropped like a shot bird to grass. As for Jim, he was too stiff to dismount, but the buckskin mare lay down with him complete; so he rolled from the saddle, and managed to stagger around. He uncinched Jones' saddle, eased his mouth of the bit, loosed the mare's girth as she lay, then knelt by Curly feeling him over for wounds. He didn't know until then that Curly had a bullet in the right arm; but all that side was in a mess of dry blood, and when he cut away the coat it began to spurt. He plugged up the hole, made a bandage with his handkerchief, twisted it up with a stick until the blood quit coming, then rolled himself down dead asleep beside his partner.

The big gale roared overhead; a haze of flying

dust; the country to the north was a flaming volcano; the sky was a whirl of clouds, all painted purple and crimson with the daybreak; but my kids and their horses cared nothing more at all for storm or fire. Then the skyline along the east began to glow white-hot, burned by the lift of the sun; and stark black against that rode a bunch of horsemen. They were coming from La Morita Custom House to find out what sort of felons had set the range on fire. They were Mexican Frontier Guards.

Their lieutenant told me afterwards that when they saw the played-out horses and those two poor kids who lay between them, they thought the whole outfit must be dead. They reckoned up Jim for one of their countrymen, and surely did everything in their power to act merciful.

Firing the range comes pretty near being a serious thing, causing inconvenience to cattle, apt to annoy settlers by burning their homes and cooking their wives and families. Naturally that sort of play is discouraged, and the Frontier Guards was only acting up to their lights in arresting my youngsters. Still, they didn't act haughty and oppressive, but sent a rider off to fetch their waggon for the prisoners, and meanwhile made camp and boiled them a drink of coffee.

The *teniente* woke them up, gave them their coffee, and told them their sins, while the rest of the greasers, talking all at once, explained what their

officer meant. As to Jim and Curly, they were interested in that coffee a whole lot, and ready to excuse the Frontier Guards; but the worries and troubles of a pack of greasers only made them tired; so they told them not to fuss, and slept through the rest of the sermon. When they woke up again, they found themselves in prison.

That calaboose at La Morita is built of the usual adobe, sun-dried brick, with a ceiling of cactus sticks laid on beams to carry a couple of feet of solid earth. A 'dobe house is the next thing to comfort in a climate like ours, where the sun will scorch a man's hide worse than boiling water. The Frontier Guards had laid clean hay on the dirt floor, and hung an *olla* of water to cool in the draught, but when my boys woke up they were sure puzzled, for the night had fallen, the moon was not yet stirring, and the place was surely dark as a wolf's mouth. Stiff and sore from hard riding, Jim got up to grope in the darkness, ravaging around in search of grub. He found hay and water, but nothing else, so thought he must have been changed into a horse, and set up a howl for corn. Then he attracted Curly's notice by tumbling over his bed.

"How many laigs have yo' got?" says Curly, "'cause that's ample. Catch me some water."

Jim reached down the hanging jar, and Curly drank. "I been waiting hours for that," says he; "now sluice my arm."

Jim threw cool water on the wound. "Is it very bad?" he asked.

"It's sure attracting my attention, Jim."

"Can I do anything?"

"Yes, next time you're falling around don't use my laigs—they're private. Whar is this place?"

Jim looked up at a window-gap, high in the 'dobe wall, and saw the starlight checkered with iron bars; then listening, he heard a muttering of Spanish talk, and noticed the door of the cell lined out with a glimmer from the guardroom.

"It smells bad, like a trap," said Curly.

"I wonder," says Jim, "what time they feed the animals? I'm starving."

"My two sides," says Curly, "is rubbing together, and I'm sure sorrowful. We done got captured somehow."

"I remember now. They gave us coffee. They must have been Frontier Guards—so this is La Morita."

"Why did they gather us in? We didn't spoil any greasers."

"No, but we fired the grass."

"It was not their grass—we set fire to Arizona."

"I don't think they mind," says Jim, "whose grass we burned. They've got us, and they won't worry about the details. You see, they've got to make a play at being useful, old chap, or else their Government would get tired and forget to send their wages."

"What will they do to us?"

"Keep us three days to cool, then find us guilty, and send us down to Fronteras."

"I remember," says Curly, "when I was riding that year for Holy Cross I saw——"

"The little wayside crosses?"

"Yes, everywhere on the Mexican side of the line —the little wooden grave signs by the trail."

Curly and Jim sat there in the dark, and thought of the wooden crosses. They understood, but I believe it's up against me to explain for folks who don't know that country. You see, there used to be only two industries in old Mexico, silver mining and stealing, but most of the people made a living by robbing each other. Then the great President Diaz came along, who had been a robber himself. He called up all the robbers he'd known in the way of business, and hired them as a sort of Mounted Rangers and Frontier Guards to wipe out the rest of the thieves. That made the whole Republic peaceful, but when there were no more robbers to shoot the Rangers and Guards began to feel monotonous, the country being plumb depleted of game.

Well, thanks to Diaz, Mexico has gone so tame that life ain't really worth living, and the Frontier Guards are scared of being disbanded because they're obsolete. Likewise the Mexican people are so humane that they don't allow capital punishment, and the Guards feel a heap discouraged about what

few prisoners they catch. They're fearful pleased if they get a thief who doesn't happen to be their own cousin, most especially if he's a white man, real game and in season. That's why they lash him hands and feet to a horse, trot him off into the desert, and take pot shots at him by way of practice. Afterwards they report him for 'attempted escape.' His relations are allowed to bury him comfortable, and put up a cross to his memory. That is why the trails along the Mexican frontier are all lined with neat little crosses.

"You reckon," says Curly, "that we'll have little crosses?"

"It's beastly awkward," says Jim, "but we've got to take our medicine."

"And yet I dunno," says Curly, thoughtful about those crosses; "if we get spoilt that way, the United States won't be pleased. You see, there's a reward out for me, and yo're wanted bad, so Uncle Sam will be asking Mexico, and say, 'Why did you shoot my meat?'"

The voices in the guardroom had quit muttering, but now a horseman pulled up at the front door.

"*Buenas noches hombre!*"

And somebody answered: "*Buenas tardes señor!*"

Then talk began in Spanish. "Can a feed of corn be bought here for the horse? He arrives from Tombstone."

"What news of the gringoes?"

"*Muchos.* El Señor Don Rex has been shot."

"Don Rex has been murdered?"

"No, it was a fight. It must be understood that his son, Don Santiago——

"What, El Chico?"

"Yes, El Chico 'Jim' had a feud against the very rich Señor Ryan. He hired ladrones from the north, the Robbers' Roost Gang it is called, to murder Señor Ryan. It seems the ladrones wore masks, and they were led by a young robber named Curly, for whom great rewards are offered—two thousand pesos d'oro, dead or alive."

"What a reward!"

"Yes, El Chico and this Curly led the robbers, and they attacked Señor Ryan in the 'Sepulchre' saloon. El Chico killed Señor Ryan himself, and wounded Miguel his son. There are many witnesses, and a warrant is out against Don Santiago for that murder. I saw the warrant."

"But you say Don Rex was killed?"

"He also; many others were killed in the battle. Curly shot Louisiana and another also. Then these ladrones escaped from the city."

"But the population!"

"You judge well, corporal—the population followed. There was riding!"

"And yet these ladrones escape?"

"So, except El Chico and Curly, the two leaders. The posse caught them near Las Salinas."

"And got the great reward—two thousand pesos d'oro!"

"But wait. These two caballeros would not submit, but fought and killed a lot more citizens; yes, even escaped. They reached the iron-way which runs down towards Bisbee, and there again they fought terribly. Then the big posse chased them clear through to the boundary-line."

"They were not caught!"

"They fired the desert!"

"Car-r-amba!"

"Yes, stampeded a hundred riders! You must have seen the fire at dawn this morning."

"Todos Santos! That was El Chico Santiago disguised as a *vaquero?*"

"Yes, and Curly as a farm boy—you saw them?"

"Man, we've got them here in chains! Two thousand pesos d'oro! *Por Dios!* You have made me rich with your news!"

"In chains, corporal? Then they did not escape after all! They fought like caballeros, and now they'll be claimed for extradition, taken back, and hanged! *Hombre*, that's no death for caballeros! How did you ever take such fighters, corporal?"

"Oh, just arrested them."

"But they fought a hundred Americanos!"

"Yes, yes, but we are Frontier Guards—me and another man; we just arrested them, that's all. Two thousand pesos!"

"They fought?"

"Oh yes, we had to disable one of them; in fact I myself shot him through the pistol arm. Then they surrendered, made their bow to force. Two thousand golden dollars!"

"Miraculous! Well, señor corporal, may it be permitted to ask where forage is sold?"

"Certainly, step this way. I, Pablo Juarez, rich! Two thousand! Santa Catalina, thou shalt have candles, a box of candles!"

The voices faded out, and Jim lay back, wiping the sweat from his face. "Wheugh"—then he burst out laughing—"the liars," he howled, "the gentle, earnest liars! Oh, pat me, Curly, for I'm weak—the lop-eared, spavined, sway-backed, cock-eyed liars!"

But Curly was shy of Spanish, and wanted the news. "What liars?"

"Everybody—they're all liars—the whole world—liars! Liars! They couldn't leave it to facts, which are bad enough, but they've lied, and sworn to lies and perjured themselves with oaths, the thugs, the dirty bar-room toughs, selling their souls to that young Ryan—and made a remnant sale of themselves for witnesses that I murdered an old man!"

"What, Ryan? It wasn't you who spoiled old Ryan. It was your father in honest fighting!"

"Who cares for honesty when there's a millionaire to pay for souls in cash? They swear that I hired you and all your robbers to have old Ryan murdered,

then did the killing myself, and turned loose your gang to massacre Ryan's friends—the cowards, the lying cowards!"

"But them boys with masks was Chalkeye's riders, and he just covered their faces, Jim, to save them afterwards."

"And who'll believe that? Here's a millionaire to buy the witnesses, the lawyers, the judge, the law! The only man who was there and can't be bribed is that leary old cow-thief Chalkeye, but he's mixed up with us, and likely enough a prisoner by now. Do you think that a Tombstone court of justice would believe an honest man? No, we're trapped, and we're sold, and we're going to be butchered now."

"Well," says Curly in that slow, soft way he had, "I allow it's done you good to turn yo' wolf loose, and you've shorely howled; it done me good to hear all the cussing said while I lay restin'. That's relieved me a lot and made me plumb forgetful of being in pain."

Jim began talking haughty, and wanted to know if Curly liked the notion of being hanged.

"That I shorely do," says Curly very soft. "You see, only a while back we was going to be taken out sudden and shot—which it was a caution to yaller snakes only to think of. That didn't make me happy a lil' bit, but now we got more prospects, a slow trial coming, time to turn around in, and think out how to escape."

"I PACED BACK STEP BY STEP"

That sobered Jim, but it made him hostile, too. 'Youngster, will nothing scare you?" he asked; "can't get a whimper out of you even for company's sake—you're so beastly selfish."

Curly rolled over, resting his face on his hand. "I was raised that way," says he very quiet, "goin' to be shot up or hung most of the time. It's a risky thing bein' alive when you come to think of it, eh? We-all is mighty or'nary folks in a trifling sort of world, Jim; but I reckon it's sure nice being heah. We got sweet range hay to lie on, and hopes of a feed in the mawning; the place is sure quiet, but we cayn't complain of being dull. As to our lil' worries, I don't fuss about crossing a river until I done reached the bank."

"I wish," Jim groaned, "that I'd got half your courage."

"I've suffered some," says Curly, "and I reckon that what you call courage is just training. Now you, Jim, you lie down, and think about something to eat, and presently yo're goin' to drop off asleep, dreaming of good camps where there's feed and water. If that ain't good I'll wake you up in the night, so's you'll get two sleeps, which is even better'n one."

CHAPTER XV

MOSTLY CHALKEYE

THE loss of my near eye has led to a lot of mistakes on my part, specially when I mistook the brands on cows and horses, thought they belonged to me, and adopted the poor lone critters—I've always been fond of animals, anyway. Again, I argue that a person with two eyes had ought to see much more truth than I can with only one eye; but I don't find that folks are liberal in making allowances. They call me hard names instead.

Now that was specially the case over the Ryan inquest. I testified that old man Ryan died a natural death, because it would have been completely unnatural for Balshannon to miss him at five paces. Moreover, as I saw things, Jim never fired at all until Ryan was dead, and only began to shoot when he saw young Michael turning loose for battle. Judge Sprynkes, Acting Assistant Deputy-Coroner, allowed that I had been a whole lot present at the fight, and was entitled to my one-eyed point of view; but then, he remarked to the jury that the witness was well known to have such a defective vision with

regard to cows that the evidence was tarnished on the point at issue.

"Judge," says I, "this is a court of justice, and I'd like to see everybody getting a fair show. Now, as judge, you're sure incorruptible and righteous."

"Come to the point," says Sprynkes.

"But," says I, "if Judge Sprynkes finds that the late Mr. Ryan met his death in a fair duel with Balshannon—then——"

"Well?"

"Then there's a citizen named Mr. Sprynkes who's apt to be reminded by the Ryan estate that he owes a heap of money!"

On that we had considerable rough house, until the judge called the meeting to order. Then he remarked, sort of casual, that he knew a citizen named Sprynkes who was apt to shoot at sight when he met up with a certain notorious horse-thief called Chalkeye Davies.

So my evidence for Jim was set aside, I was pitched out of the court, and for the next few days had to keep a wary eye on citizen Sprynkes. He was an awful poor sportsman, and mostly always missed; but once I got a bullet through my hat. Afterwards Mr. Sprynkes admitted to his friends that he preferred a restful landscape and a less bracing climate beyond the range of my guns—so he pulled out for Yuma, and I saw his kind face no more.

Now I don't want to say anything unkind about Judge Sprynkes, or his jury, or his witnesses, in that

inquest on Mr. Ryan ; but for Jim's sake it is needful to point out some facts which were remarkable. Of the people who stayed in the "Sepulchre" saloon to attend the gun-fight, eight were unable to testify, being dead, three because they had gone to hospital, two because they were engaged elsewhere at La Morita, and one, which is me, on account of defective vision. Of the rest, the most part lit out from Tombstone, and totally disappeared. There remained Mr. Michael, two bar-tenders, and four other citizens, the only people who gave evidence. These witnesses swore on oath that Jim came to the gun-fight attended by Curly McCalmont and ten masked robbers. They also swore on oath that Jim fired the first shot, killing Mr. Ryan.

The Court returned a verdict that George Ryan came to his death at the hands of James du Chesnay, and recommended his arrest upon the charge of deliberate wilful murder.

I am not complaining. The Court represented the majesty of the people, and that august flag, Old Glory, waving above us. It was a right enough Court, even if justice had strayed out and got itself lost for a while. I make no complaint, because I reckon that a still mightier Court than ours is sitting up above the starry sky to watch over fatherless kids who don't get a fair show on earth, to save them as gets desolate and oppressed, to vindicate justice upon low-lived swabs, liars, and cowards.

I said nothing, but just stayed good and acted responsible, being in a minority of one against the entire city. The only time I ventured on any remarks was when I happened accidentally to meet up with Mr. Michael. He, the Mayor, the City Marshal, and a few friends were taking a drink together at the hotel.

"Good morning, Ryan," says I, but I kept my voice all smooth for fear of rucking up my temper to no advantage.

"Good morning, sir," says Ryan.

"I come to congratulate you," says I, "on the hearty liberal way you've been acting."

"I thank you, Mr. Davies," says he, sort of ironic.

"Don't mention it," says I, "for I ain't done no kindness to you, and I don't aim for cash or thanks in what I say."

He reached for his gun, which was hazardous and apt to get fatal, only the City Marshal grabbed him before I had to fire.

"Let me be," says Ryan; "this man insults me!"

"No," says I, "that would be impossible. I only congratulate you on the whole-hearted generous way you assisted a destitute judge, and them poor hungry witnesses."

"Easy, my friend," says the Marshal, "I'm 'most deaf, but if I hear any contempts of court——"

"If you're feeling any contempt of court, Mr. City Marshal, you shares my emotions. And you, gentle-

men," I turned on the crowd, "if you feel any shame for the city and for any of the present company, I can only say I share that shame most bitter."

The air was getting sultry, with just a faint flicker of guns. "If any of you gentlemen," says I, "is feeling unwell for pills, just let him step outside with me, and I'll prescribe. If not, excuse me, for I smell something dead in this company, and I'm aiming to refresh my nose in the open." I paced back, step by step, through the door. "My address," says I, "if I live, will be Las Salinas, and there you'll find a man who cayn't see to tell the truth, but can see a whole lot to shoot. Gentlemen, *adios!*"

So I got my horse, swung to the saddle, and walked him backwards until I was out of range, but nobody offered himself up to serve for my target.

I reckon that the funeral ceremonies in honour of the late Mr. Ryan and friends made an event in the annals of Tombstone. The caskets and wreaths, the hearses and carriages, the band and procession, made the people feel uplifted with solemn pride and haughty to strangers for a full month afterwards. As the weekly *Epitaph* pointed out in large type, the occasion was great, and a city which had flourished for twenty-two prosperous years was able to give points to mere mushroom towns like Bisbee, Benson, and Lordsburgh. The newspapers in those three rival burghs made light of the affair in a way which displayed mean envy and a nasty, carping spirit.

"FOUR OF US GRIPPED CORNERS UP TO OUR SADDLES, AND RODE SLOW"

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As for me, I had got myself disliked a whole lot, so I felt it would be most decent not to attend the exercises. I had a feeling that if called upon to reply to any shooting, I might disturb the harmony which should always attend a scene of public grief. Besides that, it fell to me to arrange the burial of my old patrone, which it was difficult, the preachers, coffins, hearses, carriages, and all the funeral fixtures being engaged that day, and likewise also the graveyard. I had to go without. Moreover, the cowboys were mostly away at work on the round-up, so I only caught eight of my tribe to help me. We laid our friend on a blanket, then four of us gripped the corners up to the horns of our saddles and rode slow, the other boys coming behind until we got to the place where we had dug the grave. There was only one man of us all well educated, and that was Monte, who had been raised for a preacher before he broke lose to punch cows. Monte was shot in the face, weak, and feverish, so I had to feed him whisky before he felt proud enough for his job. He read the service, the rest of us standing round, and when he was through we fired a volley before we filled the grave and piled rocks to keep off wild animals. That was a proper stockman's funeral, away out on a hill-top in the desert, and I reckon the Great Father in heaven knew we had done our best in a brave man's honour.

CHAPTER XVI

ARRANGING FOR MORE TROUBLE

SEE what the geography-book says about Arizona —the same size as England? Shucks! There's homely ignorance from an office duck who dreams he can use a tape-measure to size up a desert. In England, if you wander round after dark, you're apt to fall off and get wet in the ocean. But you can sure stray off the edge of Arizona without the least chance of a wet, because the desert just rolls on more continuous than ever, till you're due to die of thirst. There's a practical difference in size, which your book theorist wouldn't be apt to survive.

Again, by the books we're a community of sixty thousand pink and white citizens, all purely yearning for right and justice. By the facts, we're really split up into two herds—the town men, who use the law, and the range men, who naturally prefer a six-gun.

I aim politely to say the best I can for the town men. You see, if a gentleman feels that he's just got to waltz in and rob the graves of his own parents, one may not understand his symptoms, but one has to try and think of him charitable.

Our town men has mostly been found out acting self-indulgent, and been chased around by the police. That's why they flocked to Arizona, which is convenient at the Gates of Hades, with the Breath of Flame by way of excuse for a climate. There's a sort of comfortable, smell-your-future-home feeling about old Arizona which attracts such ducks. Anywhere else they would get their necks stretched, but in Arizona they can elect judges and police out of their own tribe. Then if they happen to indulge in a little bigamy, or thieving, or shooting, the lawyers get them off. They love the law which proves them up innocent, so you may class them all as law-abiding citizens.

Now as to us plainsmen. The bad side of us is plumb apparent to the naked eye, and if there's a good side it's known to our friends, not advertised to strangers. We ain't claiming to be law-abiding citizens when we know the judge for a sure-thing politician, the lawyers for runaway gaol-birds, and the jury all for sale at the rate of a dollar a thief. We're lawless, sure enough, until we see the law dealt out by honest men.

Are you fed up with one-eyed sermons from a cow-thief? Well, suppose we apply the facts.

Here was two boys of our tribe bogged down to their withers in trouble. The town men howled for their blood, young Ryan offered plenty wealth for their raw scalps, the law claimed them for meat

—and every plain man on the range got right up on his hind legs for war. To our way of thinking robbery and killing are bad medicine, but innocent, holy joys compared with Arizona law. So naturally by twos and threes the punchers quit work on the round-up to come and smell at old Tombstone and find out why she'd got a swollen head. They hung around saloons, projecting to see if something had gone wrong with the local breed of whisky; they gathered and made war-talk in the street; they came around me, wanting to know whether or not to break out and eat that town.

"Boys," says I, "if you-all stalks round with mean eyes and dangerous smiles, these here citizens is going to hole up in their cyclone cellars and send for the army. We don't want the army messing around our game. Just you whirl in now and play signs of peace, and make good medicine. Lay low, give yo' ponies a strong feed—and wait for the night."

"Chalkeye," says one of them, "is this to be war?"

"If it was war," I told him, "I'd first send you home to yo' mother. No, kid, this is going to be smooth peace, but we're going to knock Tombstone cold with astonishment. Get plenty ammunition, feed yo' horse, and wait my gathering howl for a signal."

It was high noon when Captain McCalmont came straying down into Main Street on a "painted" horse. At Ryan's livery stable he allowed he was an un-

worthy minister, wanting water and feed for the piebald pony. At the Delmonico pie foundry he let out that he craved for sausages, mashed potatoes, and green tea. Then he had a basin of bread-and-milk, while he told the dish-slinger a few solemn truths. Apple-pie, says he, was a delusion; eating tobacco was a snare; intoxicating drink was only vanity on the lips, but raging wild-cats to the inward parts. The proper doctrine, says he, is to eschew all evil, but the wicked man leaves out that saving syllable *es*, and chews evil all the time.

Then he allowed that a toothpick would do him no harm, paid for his meal, and strayed out across the street to where I stood dealing peace among the cowboys.

"Little sinners," says he, "I perceive that you have fallen into evil company. This Chalkeye man is a pernicious influence, which would corrupt the morals of a grizzly bear. Flee from this Chalkeye person."

They wanted to take him into the nearest saloon and enjoy him for the rest of the day.

"Kin you dance?" says one of the boys, aiming a gun at his toes. "Whirl right in and dance!"

McCalmont walked right at him, eye to eye, and that same cowboy went as white as death.

"Shall I abate you," says the preacher, "in the midst of yo' sins? You done wrong—you done ate tobacco and chocolate candy mixed, then poured

on hot cawfee, rye whisky, and an ice-cream soda; and now yo're white as a corpse with mixed sins. Go take a pill, my son, and repent before yo're sick."

The boys watched that preacher smiling, and went tame as kittens. The tone of his voice just froze them up, his smile scraped their young bones, his eyes looked death.

"Come, Chalkeye," says he, and led me off into the "Spur" saloon. There he threw a glance to Cranky Joe, the bar-keep, and put his finger on Mutiny Robertson, a smuggler who sat playing poker. Cranky put someone in charge of the bar, Mutiny passed his game to a friend of his, and both of them followed meek as sheep, while the preacher led on into the backyard. From there we worked round the back street to Ryan's stable, McCalmont keeping up his baby-talk for the sake of passing strangers.

"Ah," says he, "my young friends, these deleterious pleasures change peaceful stomachs into seats of war; but the sausage soothes, the milk assuages, the pie persuades, and b'ar sign is sure good to fill up corners. Beware of vanities, and when we get to the stable-yard let Mutiny here stand guard in case I'm attacked, while I expound the blessedness of simple things. Well, here we are—you Mutiny, fall back, you lop-eared mongrel; I'm dying for a chew of 'baccy, and I'd give my off lung for a cocktail."

Mutiny stood guard, Cranky hustled off to get liquor.

"I got a line of retreat from here," says Captain McCalmont, "and a saddled hawss within reach. No, not that painted plug, but a sure crackerjack, which can burn the trail if I'm chased. How's things, you Chalkeye?"

"Clouding for storm," says I; "the air's a-crackling."

"Why for?"

I told him about his son, holed up in gaol with Jim at La Morita.

"I been projecting around thar last night"—the Captain was eating my plug tobacco like bread. "Was it you sent that doctor to Curly's wound?"

"Sure thing, sir. Why?"

He grabbed my paw. "You're white all through," says he; "that kid is all I care for in this world."

"Can they escape?"

"I dropped a crowbar through the window-hole."

"The guards will be full curious when they hear the crowbar thumping."

"That's what's the matter. I sent some Holy Crawss greasers to feed them liquor, games, and music—'specially music."

"Will the Frontier Guards miss the big blood money for the sake of a flirt at skin games?"

"I reckon they'll watch, and the crowbar's going to be heard. So I made a run to see you. Here comes Cranky Joe."

"You trust him?"

"The sight of him makes my fur crawl."

"Here, Captain," says Cranky, offering the cocktail; but the outlaw bored him through with a cool eye.

"My name," says he, "is the Reverend Perkins, and don't you forget. Now you'll send Mutiny here, and you'll stand on guard yourself. If I get captured, a friend of mine is to send your present name and address to the penitentiary, where you're wanted most—so here's to your freedom!" He drank, and we watched the man sneak off. "I turned him out of my gang," said the robber, "for being dishonest."

Mutiny strolled in and shook hands. "Old friend," says he, "what can we do to help?"

"Watch Joe, and shoot him up quick if he tries to pass that gate."

So Mutiny pulled his gun. "How's all the boys?" he asked.

"You're honing to come back to being a robber?"

"Cayn't," Mutiny groaned, "I've sure repented and turned smuggler now. Besides, I'm due to get married, so I'm dead tame and gentle, boss. What brought you south?"

"You may inquire, seh."

"Ain't you trusting me?"

"Well, Mutiny, since you want to know, I came down to hold up a train."

"Big plunder?"

"I expaict. It was a carload of birds' teeth, cat

feathers, and frawgs' tails; but there's too many inquiry agents around, so I missed the train."

Mutiny had to laugh, but then he sighed. "If anything goes wrong with my girl," says he, "I'll come scratch on yo' door."

"Wall"—the outlaw looked mighty serious—"if she happens to get drowned in the desert—perhaps we'll see you come. Now let's to business. Them kids at La Morita has to be collected, I reckon."

"Why come to we-all?" says Mutiny,—"ain't the gang handy at rescues?"

"My wolves would jump at the chance; I choked them off."

"For how?"

"Bekase"—the Captain turned his haunted eyes on me—"I don't want them po' youngsters mixed in with thieves."

"You wanted me mixed again," says Mutiny through his teeth.

"Sonny"—the outlaw laid his hand on Mutiny's shoulder—"you been a bad aig same as me, and we'd be hard to spoil. But these aigs at La Morita is new-laid, fresh aigs, so I wan' them to keep."

"You're right, boss."

"Mutiny, I sent you away for yo' good, 'ecause that girl may pull you up if anything can on airth. As for me, wall, I don't know as I care what becomes of me. I tried to turn good onc't—tried mortal hard

to run straight. I envy every honest man I see. I'm like a crawling snake, ambitious for bird wings to fly with; but still I'm no more than snake."

"The kids have a chance all right," says Mutiny.

"They have. A year ago I couldn't have drove my Curly away from the gang, but now he's paired with that du Chesnay youngster. Them colts won't care for the herd if they can run together, so I've got Curly weaned from following me to—to damnation."

"Mutiny," says I, "will you help me to gather in these boys?"

"I shorely will," says Mutiny; "but hadn't we ought to wait until they're moved up this way for trial?"

"Wall," says the outlaw, "if I kin get to fight with a small man, I don't yearn for anything larger. Whirl in on La Morita, and you're fighting Mexico; wait for a move, and you're up against the hull United States. I'd rather have a lick at lil' ole Mexico."

I told him that I had a town full of cowboys hard to hold.

"That kind won't keep," says Mutiny; "what's yo' plan?"

"I aimed," says I, "to steal young Ryan, and throw him into La Morita by way of consolation for them poor Frontier Guards when they miss their plunder."

"Now don't you touch my meat," says Captain McCalmont; "I have to feed my little small lambs on him. Now, Misteh Davies."

"Answers to the name of Chalkeye mostly."

"Wall, Chalkeye, this is the second time we meet," he bored into me with his eyes; "I understand that Balshannon's will makes you some sort of guardian of his colt."

"I reckon he needs a friend."

"Will you be a friend to my son?"

"Not more than I been already."

"Mutiny," says he, "you witness that I, Captain McCalmont, thief, and general manager of the Robbers' Roost gang of outlaws, appoints this Chalkeye Davies guardian of Curly."

"I witnesses."

"Moreover, I aim to corrupt this Chalkeye by handing him stolen money." He passed me a heavy roll of notes worth fifty thousand dollars, which is ten thousand pounds by English reckoning. "My friend," he said, "take these two kids away out of this country—break them dead gentle, keep them clean, make them forget." He gave me a letter. "Read this when you're alone."

"You trust me?" I asked.

"You trust yo'self?"

"Mutiny," says I, "you'll help?"

"Poor Mutiny," said the robber, "might help himself."

"On the dead thieving," says Mutiny, "that's so!" Then he grinned at me. "Look a-here, Chalkeye, this means that yo' pull out and hit the long trail.

Now I want a home for my girl. How much will yo' take for yo' ranche?"

"I'll see you later, Mutiny, and talk; and now shake hands, McCalmont. To-night I'll be on hand like a sore thumb, at La Morita."

CHAPTER XVII

THE REAL CURLY

THROWING back along my trail, I notice that I've mentioned a whole lot of points about Curly which made him unusual, different from other boys. Remember how he balked and shied at Holy Cross until we allowed him to hole up in a den of his own. He was sure wild and scary of railroads, towns, or a strange house. Except with his own folks, the Balshannon outfit, and me, he was dumb as a bear, and showed wild-eyed fright when strangers spoke to him. The meanest horses went tame at a word from him; no dog ever barked at him except with tail signals of joy; cats followed him around, and any animal who was hurt or in trouble would run to Curly for help. Even the deer knew his calls, and would come quite near while he spoke to them in that low soft voice of his. That voice never broke gruff with manhood, but just stayed sweet, like the sound of running water.

He had a strong face, stern as our desert country, tanned, beautiful no end, so that one caught one's breath at the very sight of him. His smile turned

me weak; his voice went through me, and I'm a sure hard case. Everybody just had to love that Curly—a born rider, a wonderful scout, a dead shot, a dangerous fighter, who bore pain like an Indian, and had heaps more sense and courage than Jim his partner.

Why do I say all this? Well, from the first, I saw that Curly youngster was undersized and weak, with a narrow chest and wide hips more like a girl than a boy. A right proper man is strong, rough, hardy; he ought to have a temper and be master, ready to work and fight for his women folk. That Curly broke down and sobbed like a girl after the gun-fight, and in a hundred soft ways was not a proper man. There were often times when I wanted to turn in and lam his head. Then I didn't, but somehow knew that Nature had played some scurvy trick on that well-meaning youngster.

Well, Jim was younger than me, so there's some excuse for him. He was rough on Curly—hostile and contemptuous when the little partner acted feminine. He owned up afterwards he'd behaved like a brute to that poor wounded, helpless critter, loving him all the while, but acting coarse; that humbled Curly, who weakened under his tongue lash, cried at times, and lay for hours sucking the wound on his arm, dumb like a dying animal. Both youngsters were surely miserable on the second and third days they lay together in prison. It was on the

second morning that I sent down a doctor from Bisbee to fix up Curly's wound.

Late that evening, towards midnight, a crowbar dropped down through the window-gap in the wall, and Jim began to labour out a hole for their escape. He dug out bricks of 'dobe one by one, and while he worked he made poor Curly sing hour after hour, to hide up the sound of the crowbar. Shall I tell you one of the songs? It's a cowboy tune for smoothing the feelings of driven cattle while they bed themselves down for night.

"Soh, Bossie, soh!
The water's handy neah,
The grass is plenty heah,
An' all the stars a-sparkle
Bekase we drive no mo'—
We drive no mo'!

The long trail ends to-day,
The punchers go to play,
And all you weary cattle
May sleep in peace for sure—
Sleep, sleep fo' sure.

The moon cayn't bite you heah,
Nor punchers fright you heah,
And you-all will be beef befo'
We need you any mo'—
We need you mo'!"

When morning broke Jim piled hay on the burrow he'd made in the foot of the wall, and lay on top, dead weary to get some sleep. At ten o'clock the doctor from Bisbee found Curly still singing, light-

headed, talking nonsense. The patient said he was a bear, so the doctor gave sleep medicine, and sat beside him. At noon he fed the boys their dinner and went away, but they didn't wake again until supper-time, when the man on guard came in.

"What's for supper?" says Curly.

"*Tortillas, frijoles*, coffee—same as usual."

"Eat it," says Curly, "'cause I'm only a bear holed up for winter. We don't eat in winter anyways."

"Bears have their coffee," says Jim.

"Oh yes, of course," and Curly fed coffee to the winter bear. That cleared his head, and he sat up watching Jim at work on the little round dishes. The food was *frijoles*, the same being beans, and *tortillas*, which is a thin corn-cake, pretty much the same as brown fly-papers, warm and damp, but sort of uninteresting to taste. The coffee was in a brown earthen pot, fresh from the fire, and mighty encouraging. Those three things make the proper feed for Mexicans, the same being simple, uninstructed people, knowing no better. When they feast they make a stew of red pepper, and take a little meat with it; but that dish is a luxury, and hot enough to burn a hole through a brick.

When Jim had eaten everything in sight he started cigarettes, listening to a banjo in the guardroom, a growing hum of talk, and the click of cups, for some Holy Cross riders were there with a jar of cactus spirit, a deck of cards, and other inducements sent in

by Captain McCalmont. Jim heard them talking war because they'd never been paid off at Holy Cross, and had six months' wages coming. They allowed that el Chico their young patrone ought to hang, and the guards agreed that such was probable. To-morrow the prisoners was going to be collected by the United States authorities for trial. Jim looked at his partner for comfort, but saw big tears rolling down Curly's face.

"You ought to be ashamed of that," says he.

"It cayn't be helped." Curly swept his arm across his face. "You Jim, we got to part to-night."

"You wild ass of the desert! What's the matter now?"

"You're goin' through that hole to find yo' liberty, but I stay here."

"Stay, and be hanged to you."

"I got to. How should I be with this wound out there on the range?"

"I'll see to that, youngster. It's only a little way to La Soledad, and I'll get you through. It may hurt, but it's not so bad as being hanged."

"I cayn't travel. We're due to be caught and killed. You go alone, Jim."

"We go together and live, or we stay together and die. Take your choice, Curly."

"Oh, I cayn't bear it—you don't understand!"

"I understand you're a little coward!"

"That's no dream."

"You own to being a coward?"

"Yes. All these years I've tried to play the game, to be a boy, to live a boy's life, but now—I'd rather die, and get it finished."

"Why?"

"I've been off my haid last night and all to-day. This pain has stampeded me, and I'm goin' crazy. To-night the pain is worse. I'll be making fool talk, giving myself away, and you'll find me out. It's better to own up than to be found out."

"To own up what?"

"Oh, don't be hard on me, Jim! I tried so hard! I was born for a boy, I had to be a boy. Don't you see, girls was plumb impossible in a gang of robbers!"

"Have you gone mad?"

"Oh, you cayn't understand, and it's so hard to say." Curly lay face downwards, hiding a shamed face. "My mother must have made a mistake—I wasn't bawn for a boy."

"Good gracious!"

"I had to be raised for a boy—it had to be done. What else was possible at the Robbers' Roost?"

"And you're not a boy!"

"God help me, I'm only a girl."

"You, a girl?"

"Oh, don't be hard on me—it ain't my fault! I tried so hard to be a man—but I'm crazy with pain—and I wisht I was daid!"

"But I can't believe—it can't be true. Why, I've

seen you ride—the first horseman in Arizona, scout, cowboy, desperado, wanted for robbery and murder —you a girl!"

"Have pity! Don't! Don't talk like that—I'm not so bad as you think—I never robbed—I never——"

"You killed men to save my life. Oh, Curly, I'm so sorry I talked like that—I take it all back. I must have been *loco* to call you a coward—I wish I'd half your courage! I never knew a woman could be brave; my mother wasn't, and all the girls I've known —they weren't like you. Oh, the things you've seen me do, the things I've said—treating you no better than a boy. Can you ever forgive the way I treated you?"

One little hand stole out and touched him: "Stop—talk no more."

A *vaquero* was singing for all he was worth in the guardroom, to the strum of a guitar, while hands clapped out the time—

"I could not be so well content,
So sure of thee,
Señorita,
Lolita;
But well I know thou must relent
And come to me,
Lolita!"

Jim set to work to finish his hole in the wall, prying out the 'dobe bricks with his crowbar, and he

sure wrought furious, timing his strokes to the clapping hands, the guitar, and the swinging chorus—

"The caballeros throng to see
Thy laughing face,
Señorita,
Lolita;
But well I know thy heart's for me,
Thy charm, thy grace,
Lolita!

"I ride the range for thy dear sake,
To earn thee gold,
Señorita,
Lolita;
And steal the gringo's cows to make
A ranche to hold
Lolita!"

The cactus liquor was getting in its work, the guardroom crowded up all it would hold of soldiers, *vaqueros*, customs men, travellers; then there was dancing, singing, gambling, squabbling, all the row which belongs to general drunk. Curly was fretted up to high fever, riding herd on a bunch of dream cows, and Jim was pouring in his strength on the 'dobe bricks. At two in the morning the Frontier Guards began to make war talk, wanting to turn the prisoners loose, with a prize for the soldier who got first kill with a gun. On that the Holy Cross *vaqueros* proposed to rescue their young patrone, and wipe out the Frontier Guards. There was considerable rough house with knife and gun, until the guards

subdued the *vaqueros*, jumped on their heads, and herded them into No. 2 cell as prisoners of war. The *vaqueros* were just moaning for blood, the Guards turned loose to celebrate their victory with more drinks, and while the row was enough to drown artillery, Jim's crowbar drove a brick which fell outside the wall. Now he had only to pry 'dobes loose one by one until the hole was big enough to let out prisoners. Sometimes he had to quit and hold his breath while the sentry came reeling past along his beat. Once he had to play dead, because a drunken sergeant rolled into the cell to give him a drink of *meseal*. The sergeant called him brother, hugged him, kissed him, cried, and went away. At three o'clock Jim crawled out through the hole with his crowbar, lay for the sentry, jumped up behind, clubbed him, and got the rifle. Then he dragged Mr. Sentry into the cell, wrapped him in Curly's blanket, and made up a dummy to look like himself in case the sergeant of the guard should remember to call again.

"Curly!" he shook his partner out of sleep. "Curly, the spring time is coming—it's time for little bears to come out of hole."

"Yo' gawn all foolish," says Curly, "callin' me a bear. I done forget who I am, but I'm too sure sick to be a bear."

"Let's play bear," says Jim, mighty shy; "I'll bet you I'm first through this hole!"

The guardroom had gone quiet, the men there being just sober enough not to fall up off the floor, but the sergeant was droning with the guitar, sobbing out the tail end of the old Lolita song—

"I ride the range for thy dear sake,
To win thee gold,
S'rita,
Lolita,
To steal the gringo's cow-ow-ow——"

Curly was first out through the hole chasing dream bears. "The wind's in the west," she said, looking at the big stars above.

"Crawl up the wind," Jim whispered. "We want our horses; where are they?"

Curly sat up snuffing at the wind, then pointed. "The hawss smell's thar," she said, "but there's a scent of pony-soldiers too—many soldiers."

Jim trailed over cat-foot to the stable and looked in through the door. A lantern hung in the place, and some of the Frontier Guards sat round a box on the hay gambling earnest. If he went off to a distance, and handed out a few shots to draw the guard away searching, he reckoned there might be time to sneak round and steal a horse before they began to stray back. But then there was Curly all delirious with fever, and whimpering small wolf calls, so that every dog in the place had started to bark. The wolf calls had to be stopped, and a new dream started which would keep the little partner good and

silent. That is why Jim took a handful of dust which he said was salt.

"Come along, Curly," he whispered, "we're going to stalk the buffalo; to still hunt the buffalo; we must be fearfully quiet, or we'll never put the salt on their tails. Don't you see?"

"But the buffalo's all gawn extinct!"

"Oh, that's all right; it's not their fault, poor things. Come on, and we'll salt their tails."

"I'm sort of tired," says Curly right out loud, and Jim went cold with fright. He could hear the soldiers squabbling over their game not fifty feet away, then the sound of somebody's footsteps rambling over from the guard-house. A soldier staggered drunk within two yards of him, and rolled in at the stable door.

"Come on, old chap," Jim whispered; "I'm your horse, so climb on my back, and we'll travel."

So he put the little partner on his back, and staggered away into the desert. He had one cartridge in the gun, no water, only the stars to guide him, and at sunrise the Frontier Guards would see his tracks. There was no hope.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WHITE STAR

AS soon as Captain McCalmont was clear of the city I meandered in a casual way around the saloons, taking a drink here, a cigar there, passing the word for a meeting of cowboys only. They were to ride out by twos and threes for home in the usual way, but the time for the meeting was sunset, and the place a slope of hillside beyond Balshannon's grave. There we gathered to the number of thirty head, and Mutiny rode into the bunch to cut out any strangers who might have strayed with the herd. There being no strays, I spoke—

"Boys, you-all knows who was buried here on the hilltop. He was my friend, and a sure friend of all range men." Some of the boys uncovered, one called—

"Spit it out, ole Chalkeye! When you starts up yo' church, rent me a stall!"

"I'll hire yo' ruddy scalp," says I, "instead of lamps. Wall, boys, these town toughs has shot out El Señor Don, and they're proposing to play their pure fountain of law on two more of our tribe, the

same being young Jim his son, and little Curly McCalmont."

"Say, Chalkeye, when do you get yo' dividends from Messrs. Robbers, Roost, and Co.?"

"Why, Buck, it's just on them days when I trusts you with loans of money."

The crowd knew Buck's habit of not paying his debts, and proposed to divide up his shirt and pants if he got too obvious with remarks.

"Boys," I went on, "we been letting these town citizens get too much happy and animated, throwing dirt in our face. Why, here's down east newspapers sobbing obituary notices over the poor cowboy species departed. Seems that we-all, and the mammoth, and the dodo, and the bison is numbered with the past, and our bones is used to manure the crops of the industrious farmer. Does that splash you?

"Dear departed, I appeals to you most sorrowful—ain't it time to show signs of being alive? Not being a worker of miracles, I don't aim to corrupt yo' morals, I ain't proposing to obliterate the town which provides us with our liquor and groceries, I ain't a party to acts of violence; but I do propose that we just whirl in to-night and rescue them po' kids at La Morita. Of course, in busting the calaboose we may have to shoot up a few Mexicans—but it does them good to be taken serious at times, and they'd sure hate to be ignored while we stole their captives."

Mutiny called out, "Say, now you've got yo' tail up, you ain't forgetting to talk."

And on that the boys got riotous—"Rair up some more, ole Chalkeye; let's see you paw the moon!"

"You tell the lies, we'll stick to 'em!"

"Who stole Ryan's cows, eh, Chalkeye?"

"Let the old horse-thief turn his wolf loose! Ki-yi-yeou-ou-ou!"

"Loo-loo-loo-Yip! Yow!"

"Girls," says I, "you're gettin' plenty obstreperous. Come on—let's roll our tails for old Mexico!"

The boys came yelping, and we trotted the night through, throwing the miles behind us.

At three o'clock, to judge by the stars of Orion, we rested our ponies near the boundary, at the streak of dawn loped on, and just as the day broke hurricaned in a gun-blaze down on La Morita.

I regret to state for your information that the Mexican Frontier Guards were too sleepy to play up their side of the game, but surrendered abject before they had time to get hurt. Moreover, our youngsters had vamoosed through a hole in the wall. So there were no captives to liberate, except four measly *vaqueros*, which gave us a red-hot cussing at being waked too early for coffee time. We had a sickening miserable picnic, a waste of sweat and oratory.

Slow and solemn we gaoled up those soldiers in the

calaboose, and mounted the sulky *vaqueros* for a guard to hold them, feeling all the time like a batch of widows.

In the stable I found Curly's buckskin mare and my fool horse Jones, the pair of which I took when we started for home. As to Jim and Curly, we held a council smoke, debating on their fate. The crowd agreed that these kids had been my pupils, and would be sure horse-thieves naturally. I felt they had gone afoot, but scouting around, I failed to find their sign. There was a track of a man with cowboy heels, going east, but it seemed to wiggle drunk. I never thought of Jim rolling along as he did with Curly on his back, but searched for the tracks of the pair running side by side. If I had only been a better scout I might have understood the lone track, and followed with horses to mount my youngsters for flight. We could have made an easy escape from the country, ending all our troubles—but I was a fool.

So soon as my tribe pulled out for home I knew that the Frontier Guards would be loose at once like burned-out hornets. To linger in their way would be unhealthy, and I had no tracks to follow anyway. So I pulled out with the rest, taking all guns and horses, leaving the Guards disarmed and afoot lest they should try to act warlike. Further north the guns were thrown away, except some retained as mementoes, and we used the Mexican herd of ponies to cover our tracks where we scattered.

This episode is alluded to by the foolish cowboys as "Chalkeye's victory—all talk and run."

A couple of miles to the eastward of La Morita Jim found that his little partner weighed a ton. After working all night, and struggling to the limit of his strength, he could go no further. The day was breaking; to move by daylight meant an extra risk of being seen, and there was nothing to be gained by travelling. So he staggered to the nearest hilltop, found a good look-out point, then smashed up some local rattlesnakes, and laid Curly to rest under a sheltering rock. From there he watched what the weekly *Epitaph* described as "an infamous outrage, perpetrated at La Morita by a gang of cowardly ruffians." Not that Jim was shocked—indeed, I reckon the lad put up signs of depraved joy. He said to the little partner—

"We're sure saved, Curly, from being tracked down by the Guards and murdered."

I calculate that one ordinary Arizona day without food and water would have finished Curly, but as it happened this was a desert Sabbath, when the clouds had a round-up for prayer. I ain't religious; it's no use for a poor devil like me to make a bluff at being holy, and if I went to church the Big Spirit would say: "Look at this Chalkeye person playing up at Me in a boiled shirt—ain't this plumb ridiculous?"

It's no use, because I'm bad, but yet it humbles me down low to watch the clouds when they herd together for prayers, flirting their angel wings against the sun, lifting their gruff voices in supplication, tearing up the sky with their lightnings, sending down the rain of mercy to us poor desert creatures. The respectable people hire preachers to tell the Big Spirit of their wants, but it's the white clouds of the sky that says prayers for us ignorant range folk, for the coyotes, the deer and panthers, the bears and cows, the ponies and the cowboys. Then the rain comes to save us from dying of thirst, and we cusses around ungrateful because it makes us wet.

When the storm broke that morning, the rain roared, the ground splashed, the hills ran cataracts, and Jim and Curly got washed out of their camp, the same becoming a pool all of a sudden, and were much too wet to go to sleep again. Moreover, the fever had left off prancing around in Curly's brain, and the cold had eased her wound like some big medicine.

Jim had found a corner under the rock ledge which was perfectly dry. His leather Mexican clothes were shrunk tight with rain, the staining ran in streaks on his face, his teeth played tunes with the cold.

"El Señor Don Santiago," says Curly, "yo' face has all gawn pinto, and it don't look Mexican that

a-way in stripes. Maybe yo're changing into a sort of half-breed."

"I'm beastly cold," says Jim, grave as a funeral.

"Same here," she laughed. "Don't you think yo' disguise would pass for something in the way of striped squir'ls? With a rat in yo' paws you'd do for a chipmunk."

"Let me be," says Jim. "How's your wound?"

"Not aching to hurt, just to remind me it's there. How did we get to this rock?"

Jim told her about the escape, and how the Frontier Guards had been left afoot, and how the storm had come convenient to wash out the raiders' tracks as well as his own.

The rain had quit, and the plain was shining like a sea of gold which ran in channels between the island groups of purple mountains. So one could sure see range after range melting off into more than a hundred miles of clear distance, to where the sunshine was hot beyond the clouds. That clearness after rain is a great wonder to see, and makes one feel very good.

"Talk some more," says Curly, "then I won't be encouraging this wound by taking notice of it."

"Shall I lift you here to this dry corner?"

"No, it's a sure fight moving. Leave me be."

"Curly, how did you get that scar above your eye?"

"Buck handed me that. He's shorely fretful at times. Who's Buck? Why, he's second in command

of our gang. No, he's a sure man. I'm plenty fond of Buck."

"The brute! I'll wring his beastly neck! You love him?"

"Wouldn't you love all yo' brothers, Jim?"

"Oh, brothers—that's all right. But why did the rotten coward make that scar?"

"You see, Buck's plenty fond of me, and his emotions is r'aring high, specially when—wall, I refused to be Mrs. Buck. It sounded so funny that I had to laugh. Then he got bucking squealing crazy, and when he's feeling that a-way he throws knives, which it's careless of him."

"He wounded you with a knife? The cur!"

"Oh, but Buck was remorseful a whole lot afterwards, and father shot him too. Father always shoots when the boys get intimate. Poor Buck! I nursed him until he was able to get around again, and he loves me worse than ever. It cayn't be helped."

"So these robbers know that you—that you're a girl?"

"They found me out last year. Yes, it's at the back of their haids that I'm their lil' sister, and they're allowed to be brothers to me, Jim. Now don't you snort like a hawss, 'cause they 're all the brothers I've got."

"You're not afraid of them?"

"You cayn't think what nice boys they are. Of

course, being robbers, they claims to have been hatched savage, and brung up dangerous, pore things. Father tells 'em that they has no occasion for vain-glorious pride, 'cause their vocation is mean."

"He's dead right, and I'm glad he shoots them!"

"Generally in the laigs. He says he reckons that a tender inducement to being good is better than a bullet through the eye. Of co'se thar has to be some discipline to chasten they'r hearts, or they'd get acting bumptious."

"Humph!"

"But you don't savvy. Father has to press his views on the boys, but they'd be much worse if it wasn't for him. He says he's a heaps indulgent parent to 'em, and I reckon he shorely is. Father's the best man in the whole world. Do you know he only kills when he has to, and not for his own honour and glory? Why, he won't rob a man unless he's got lots of wealth. Once he was a bad man, but that's a long while ago, before I remember."

"Were you always raised as a boy?"

"Allus. He made me learn to ride, and rope, and shoot, from—ever since I was weaned. When I got old enough he learned me scouting, cooking, packing a hawss, tending wounds, hunting—all sorts of things. I been well educated shore enough, more than most boys."

"It's all beastly rot calling him good—McCalmont good!"

"IT MAKES ME SICK TO THINK OF YOU WITH A GANG OF THIEVES"

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"A hawss or a dawg, or a lil' child will run from a bad man, but they love my father. Oh, but you don't know how good he is!"

"Well, let it go at that. You wanted to be a robber?"

"Shorely, yes, but he never would let me. It ain't true what that sign-paper says up in the city yonder, that I robbed a train. I wasn't there at all. You see, father picked up on the home trail with a starving man, and helped him. That mean, or'nary cuss went and told Joe Beef, the sheriff, that I was in the gang which held up the train. That's why I'm due to be hunted and roped, or shot at by any citizen who wants two thousand dollars. Of co'se, it's nacheral there should be a bounty offered on wolf haids, but I'd like to have a nice wolf-time before I'm killed. I never had a chance to get my teeth in, 'cept only once. Yes, we stole six hundred head of cattle from the Navajos, and you should just have seen the eager way they put out after us. They was plenty enthoosiastic, and they came mighty near collecting our wigs."

"It makes me sick to think of you with a gang of thieves."

"Father says that the worst crimes is cowardice, meanness, and cheating. The next worse things is banks, railroad companies, lawyers; and that young Ryan — 'specially Ryan — he says that us robbers is angels compared with trash like that."

"That's no excuse."

"Father says that robbery is a sign that the law is rotten, and a proof that the Government's too pore and weak to cast a proper shadow. He allows we're a curse to the country, and it serves the people right."

"It's bad—you know it's bad!"

"Shore thing it's bad. Do you know what made us bad? All of our tribe was cowboys and stockmen once; not saints, but trying to act honest, and only stealing cows quite moderate, like ole Chalkeye. Then rich men came stealing our water-holes, fencing in our grass, driving our cattle away."

"Why didn't you get a lawyer—wasn't there any law?"

"There shorely was. My father's farm was way back in Kansas. His neighbour was a big cattle company, which hadn't any use for farms or settlers. They turned their cattle into his crops, they shot my brother Bill, they wounded father. Then father went to law, and the lawyers skinned him alive, and the judge was a shareholder in the Thomas Cattle Company—he done gave judgment that we-all was in the wrong. Then father appealed to the big Court at Washington, which says he had the right to his land and home. So the cattle company set the grass on fire and burned our home. Mother was burned to death, and father he went bad. I was the only thing he saved from the fire."

"Poor beggar! No wonder he turned robber. I'd have done the same, by Jove!"

"He shot Judge Thomson first, then he killed Mose Thomson, and the sheriff put out to get him. He got the sheriff. Then he went all through Kansas and Colorado, gathering pore stockmen what had been robbed and ruined by the rich men's law. They held up pay-escorts, stage coaches, banks, the trains on the railroad. That was the beginning of the Robbers' Roost."

Jim sat heaps thoughtful looking away across the desert. "Our breeding cattle," says he, tallying on his fingers, "then Holy Cross, then mother, then father, and now I'm being hunted for a murder I didn't commit."

"Now you know," says Curly, "why we robbers played a hand in yo' game."

"I understand. Say, Curly, I take back all I said about it being bad—this robbery-under-arms. It's the only thing to do."

"Don't you get dreaming," says Curly, "we-all ain't blind; our eyes is open a whole lot wide to truth, and we make no bluff that robbery and murder is forms of holiness."

"It's all right for me. I'm a man, and I'm not a coward, either. But, Curly, you're not fit for a game like this. I'm going to take you away—where you'll be safe."

"And whar to?"

Jim looked at the desert steaming after the rain, hot as flame, reaching away all round for ever and ever. He looked at Curly's wound all swollen up, her face which had gone gaunt with pain and weakness. They were afoot, they were hunted, they had no place to hide.

"Whar do you propose to take me?" says Curly.

"I don't know," says Jim; "perhaps your people aren't so bad after all—anyway, they tried to keep you clean."

"And what's the use of that? D'ye think I want to be alone in the hull world—clean with no folks, no home? Why should I want to be different from my father, and all my tribe? Would I want to be safe while they're in danger? Would I want to play coward while they fight? Shucks! Father turned me out to grass onced at the Catholic Mission, and them priests was shorely booked right through to heaven. What's the use of my being thar, while the rest of my tribe is in hell? I dreamt last night I was in hell, carrying water to feed it to my wolves; I couldn't get a drop for myself—never a drop."

"Curly, I've got to save you—I must—I shall!"

She laughed at him. "You! Do you remember me at Holy Crawss when I punched cows for Chalkeye? I might ha' been thar still but for you."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Jim, I met up with yo' mother, and I didn't want to be bad any more when I seen her."

"She thought the world of you."

The poor child broke out laughing, "Oh, shucks!" Then her face went bitter. "She said she loved me, eh?"

"She said I was a beastly little cad compared with you. When I got home from college she held you up for a holy example, and rubbed my nose in it. She was right—but how I cursed you!"

Curly laughed faint and lay back moaning, for the sun had come hot from the clouds, and she was burning with pain. "So yo' mother claimed she loved me. Well, I know better!"

"Why didn't you stay with her, Curly?"

"I seen her face when she waited for you to come home—you, Jim, and she looked sure hungry. What was I to her, when she seen her own son a-coming? I waited to see you, Jim; I jest had to see you 'cause you was pizen to me. Then I went away 'cause I'd have killed you if I'd seen you any mo'."

"Where did you go?"

"Whar I belong, back to the wolf pack. What had I to do with a home, and a mother, with shelter, and livin' safe, and bein' loved? I'm only a wolf with a bounty on my hide, to be hunted down and shot."

"And you—a girl!"

"No, a mistake!"

Jim pawed out, and grabbed her small brown hand. "You came back," he whispered.

"I came back to see if that Ryan was goin' to wipe you out, you and yo' people. I came to see you die."

"And saved my life!"

"I reckon," says Curly. "I ain't quite responsible anyways for my life—'ecause I'm only a mistake—jest a mistake. I feels one way, and acts the contrary; I whirl in to kill, and has to rescue; I aims to hate—and instead of that I——"

"What?"

"I dunno," she laughed. "Up home at Robbers' Roost we got a lil' book on etiquette what tells you how ladies and gentlemen had ought to act in heaps big difficulties. It shorely worries me to know whether I'm a lady or a gentleman, but it's mighty comfortin' the way that book is wrote. I done broke all my wolves outer that book to set up on their tails and act pretty. Now, if I had the book I'd know how I'd ought to act in regard to you-all."

Jim looked mighty solemn, being naturally about as humorous as a funeral. "Am I nothing to you?" he asked, feeling hurt; but she just opened one eye at him, smiling, and said nothing.

Presently the pain got so bad that she began to roll from side to side, scratching with her free hand at the face of the rock overhead.

"Can't I do something?" says Jim. "It's awful to sit and watch that pain. I must do something."

"If you climb to the top of this rock," she said between her teeth, "you'd see La Soledad. My father's thar."

"I'll run."

"Why run?" She snatched a small round looking-glass out of the breast of her shirt. "You've only to get the sun on this glass and flash the light three times upon La Soledad. The man on look-out will see the flash."

"Give me the glass, then."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Do you know what it means, Jim, if you flash that signal?"

"Rescue for you."

"And for you, Jim? It means that you quit bein' an honest man, it means shame, it means death. Us outlaws don't die in our beds, Jim."

"Give me the glass."

"No, Jim. Some time soon, when you and me is riding with the outfit, or camped at our stronghold, the army is goin' to come up agin' us—pony soldiers, and walk-a-heaps, and twice guns, to take our water-holes, to drive away our *remuda*, to block our escape trails, to close in on us. Our fires are goin' to be put out, our corpses left to the coyotes and the eagles."

"Give me that glass!"

"And my father says that beyond that is the Everlastin' Death."

"Do you think you can frighten me? Give me that glass!" He snatched the glass from her hand, scrambled to the top of the rocks, and flashed the light three times upon La Soledad.

A white star answered.

CHAPTER XIX

A MARRIAGE SETTLEMENT

McCALMONT was hid up at the *ranchita* La Soledad, with a sentry out to the south-west watching La Morita, a sentry out to the west to keep tab on the Bisbee trail, a sentry out to the north on the Tombstone road, and Buck Hennesy, his segundo, riding from point to point with feed and water. When anything happened the sentries flashed a signal to Buck, who warned the chief. At sunrise McCalmont had news of our raid on La Morita, and that made him think for sure that the kids were rescued. He'd been riding all night, so he got his eye down quick for a big sleep. The storm rolled up, burst, and trailed off to the eastward; the sun shone out, lifting white steam from the desert; then came the heat. At two o'clock, away southward through the quivering haze, Buck sighted the three-flash signal, which means "Help." He threw back the two-flash, "Coming."

So he and the chief loped out, taking a canteen of cold tea, which is the proper medicine for thirst, and a led horse each, to bring the youngsters in to the

little ranche. By four o'clock they had Curly bedded down in the shack, supposing herself to be a prairie-dog, and wanting to know who'd come and stole her tail. McCalmont nursed her, Buck went off to spoil the trail from the hill, and Jim squatted down on the doorstep for a feed of pork and beans, with lashings of coffee.

The main outfit of the robbers was camped at Las Aguas, some miles to the north-east, and three of them came in at dusk to get their supper and relieve the sentries around La Soledad. They were heaps shy when they saw what looked like a greaser *vaquero* sitting in the doorway of the cabin. One of them rode right at him.

"Here, you," he shouted. "Git out 'er here *pronto!* Vamoose!"

"*Poco tiempo*," says Jim.

"Who are you, anyways?"

"*Quien sabe?*"

"Wall, ye cayn't stay here, so ye'd best get absent." He pulled his gun on Jim's feet. "Now jest you prance!"

Jim laughed at him.

"*Mañana*," he said. Then in English, "You bark a lot, my friend. Whose dog are you?"

Then he heard McCalmont's slow, soft drawl. "I sure enjoy to see the sire's grit show out in the young colt. Spoke like a man, Jim! And as to you, Crazy Hoss, I want you to understand that if you don't

learn deportment I'll politely lam yo' haid, you, you double-dealing foogitive, low-flung, sheep-herdin' son of a lop-eared thug! Hain't you got no more sense than a toorist, you parboiled, cock-eyed, spavined, broken-down, knock-kneed wreck o' bones? You——!"

With such genteel introductions McCalmont sure spouted burning wrath into that robber, scorching holes until he lost his breath.

"The evil communications of this young polecat," says he to Jim, "is shorely spoiling my manners. And now, you—you turtle-doves, you'll jest get away out of here and cook your supper thar by the barn. You want to be mighty quiet too, 'cause my Curly is lying in here wounded. Git over now!"

The robbers trailed off grinning, while the chief sat down on the doorstep next to Jim.

"The children make me peevish," he said, and began to roll a cigarette in his fingers. "Wall, do you remember, Jim? I allowed we'd be better friends when we met again."

Jim looked round sharp and sat there studying McCalmont. He didn't look bad or dangerous, but just a middle-aged cattle-man of the old long-horn desert breed. Our folks are rough and homely; we've got a hard name, too, but we stay alive in a country which kills off all but the fighters. McCalmont had a cool blue eye, humorous and kind, and grey hair straggling down over a face that was

tanned to leather. The stiff-brimmed cowboy hat was jammed on the back of his head, the white silk handkerchief hung loose about his shoulders. He wore a grey army shirt, blue overalls, stuffed anyhow into his boots, and a loose belt of cartridges, slinging the Colt revolver on his hip. Somehow the youngster felt drawn to him, knowing he'd found a friend of the kind that lasts.

"And you were that sky-scout?" says he.

"A most unworthy shepherd! Jest you look at my sheep," says McCalmont.

Jim asked how long it was since they met that day on the range.

"It seems a year to you, eh, lad? That was six days ago, the way I reckon time."

"So much has happened—sir—can it be less than a week? I was only a boy then—and Curly——"

"My son has struck you serious."

"She has told me everything, sir."

"Yo' goin' to remember to speak of Curly as a boy. He is allooded to as a boy, or I get hawstile. You understand that?"

"I understand."

"And now," says McCalmont, "we'll have that buckboard ready in case we need to pull out."

There was a buckboard standing in the yard, the same being a four-wheel dogtrap, with a springy floor of boards, easy for travel. Jim helped McCalmont to stow some cases and a keg of water, fill sacks with

sweet range hay for Curly's bed, and cover the whole with a canvas ground-sheet.

"You think," says Jim, "that we'll be chased to-night?"

"I dunno, Jim, but it looks to me as that's how the herd is grazing."

When supper was ready they strayed across to the fire and joined issue with beef, hot bread, and coffee, the same being taken serious without waste of time or talk. We range-folk don't interrupt our teeth with aimless discourse. By smoke-time Buck loped off in the dusk to find the *remuda* of ponies out at grass, and the boys had a cigarette while he gathered, watered, and drove the ponies home. Then the team for the buckboard was caught, harnessed, and tied up with a feed of corn; each man roped and saddled his night horse; and Buck, with the three relief men, rode out slow, curving away into the starlight.

McCalmont roped a sorrel mare for Jim, then found him a spare saddle, a bridle, a blanket, belt, gun, and spurs.

"Now," says he, "jest bed yo'self down, but don't undress. Keep yo' hawss to hand, sleep rapid, and in case of alarm jump quick. An outlaw's bed, my son, ain't feathered for long sleeps."

Jim lay awake and watched until the day guard came loping in with Buck. He saw them rope and saddle their remounts, catch their supper, bed down, and smoke the final cigarette. It all felt homely and

good to be with cowboys again, to have his blanket on the dust, his horse and gun beside him, to know he was free and moderately safe, to look up drowsy at a great white sky of stars. Jim was a plainsman in those days sure enough, content, range fashion, to have the whole earth for a bed, the night for a bedroom, and the starry palace of the Great Spirit to shelter him while he slept. Kings and emperors and such have to hole up at night in mean quarters compared with that.

Somewhere out on the range McCalmont's guard-camp kept a sentry alert through the night, and when Jim woke up he saw the day guard swarming off in the grey of dawn to relieve them. He washed himself in the horse-trough, and helped McCalmont to cook breakfast.

"Now don't you make too much fire," says the chief, "'cause the less smoke we show the better for our health. We want no strangers projecting around to pay us mawning visits."

"Colonel," says Jim, "how's Curly?"

"Right peart, and chirping for breakfast."

The boys came rolling in from night guard. "Now you, Crazy Hoss," says McCalmont, "rope the day hawsses, and put the herd to grass befo' you feed. You, Buck, is all secure?"

"Wall, boss, there's United States pony-soldiers, three hundred haid of 'em, comes trailing down out of the Mule Pass."

"Heading this way?"

"No, seh; they're pointing for La Morita."

"I see. It's because of the shockin' outrage yesterday on them pore Mexican Guards at La Morita. I expaict that ole Mexico is up on its ear for war, and they'll be sending their army to eat the United States. Jest take yo' glasses, Buck, and see if that Mexican army is coming along."

Buck rode to the nearest hill and looked over the top without showing himself on the skyline; then he came sailing back, and rolled up to the chief, all snorting.

"There's the dust of an army on the Fronteras trail."

"Them rival armies," McCalmont drawled, "will talk theyrselves into fits, and the rival Governments will talk theyrselves into fits, and all the newspapers will talk theyrselves into fits; then they'll agree that La Morita was raided, and they'll agree that it was the acts of wicked robbers, and they'll agree it was *me*. 'Spose we have our coffee."

All through the night McCalmont had been sitting up with Curly, treating her wound to a course of cold wet bandages once in five minutes to reduce the swelling. After breakfast he went back again to her side, and his teeth were sure set hard, because he had made up his mind to dig for the bullet, which caused her more pain than was needful. As for Jim, he squatted on the doorstep outside, with time at

last to think. His affairs had been some hurried and precipitous in this one week, which cost him his parents, his home, his business as master of a tribe of cowboys, his friends, his prospects, his reputation as an honest man. And now the whirlwind had dropped him on the doorstep of a 'dobe shack to think the matter over quietly and have a look at himself. He was an orphan now, poor as a wolf, hunted, desperate, herded with thieves. What was the use of trying to earn an honest living when the first respectable person he met would begin the conversation by shooting him all to pieces?

Then he heard McCalmont calling him: "Say, can yo' lawdship oblige me with the loan of a pin?"

His lordship! The poor chap remembered now that he was Viscount Balshannon, Baron Blandon, and several different sorts of baronets.

"Yo' lawdship!"

"McCalmont," he howled, "you brute!"

Then he heard Curly telling her father to behave himself, and his mind went off grazing again over the range of his troubles. There was that Curly, the famous desperado, the fighting frontiersman, the man who had saved his life—and all of a sudden he had to think of him—of her—as a poor girl crazy with pain. Jim had to face a fact which had hit his very soul, turned the world upside down, and left him wriggling. It was no use being hostile or disappointed; he couldn't make believe he was glad.

Curly didn't feel like a chum or a partner now; he couldn't imagine her as any sort of sister or friend. She just filled his life until there was nothing else to care for on earth, and it made his bones ache.

Then McCalmont began to work with some sort of surgical instruments, probing her wound for the bullet. He heard her make little moans, whimpers, and stopped his ears with his fingers. Then she screamed.

Jim was shaking all over, but with that scream he knew what had happened to himself. He had fallen head over ears in love with that same Curly.

After a long time McCalmont came out of the shack and sat down alongside of Jim. The robber was white as a ghost; he was trembling and gulping for breath.

"Here," he cried, "you take this."

Jim took the thing in his hand—a flattened bullet, all torn around the edges and streaked with blood.

For some time he just sat staring at that bullet, scared by his own thoughts. "Captain," says he at last, "Curly's not dying?"

"Why, not to any great extent, my son." McCalmont lay back on a dirt floor, and yawned. "He's sleeping a whole lot now, and if you'll stay around in case he wakes, I'll take a few myself; I'm kinder tired."

The robber dropped off to sleep, and Jim sat watching beside him. At noon the boys off duty in

the yard called him to dinner, but McCalmont slept far into the afternoon. Then of a sudden he started broad awake, his hand on his gun, staring out at the blazing heat of the desert.

"That's all right," says he; "three hours' rest is enough for hawsses and robbers, so I reckon I've took more'n my share."

"Curly's still sleeping," says Jim.

"I'll catch some lunch, then."

Jim watched him ranging about the yard, bread in one hand, meat in the other, eating his dinner while he hustled his men to work. He kept three young robbers busy until the camp gear was stowed for travel, and all the litter was hid away out of sight. Then he made them bury the ashes of the camp fire, and smooth over all the tracks until the ground looked as though there had been no visitors for a week.

After that he brought a pencil and notebook for Jim.

"I want you to write," he said; "scrawl yo' worst, and put down all the spellin' ignorant. Write:—'Dere Bill, I'm gawn with the buckboa'd for grub. Back this even.'—B. Brown.' Yes, that will do."

He took the book from Jim, tore out the leaf, and hung it on the door conspicuous.

"Thar's times," he said, "when sheriffs and marshals, and posses of virtuous citizens gets out on the war-path in pursuit of robbers. They comes pointing along mighty suspicious, and reads the

tracks on the ground, and notes the signs, and sniffs the little smells, and in they'r ignorant way draws false concloosions. Meanwhile the robbers has adjourned."

Jim's face was as long as a coffin. "Captain," says he, "I've been thinking."

"I'm sorry yo're took bad, my son." The robber sat down beside him. "Let me see yo' tongue."

"Don't laugh at me. Will you mind, Captain McCalmont—if—if I speak of Curly—just this once —as—as a woman?"

"Turn yo' wolf loose, my son, I'm hearing."

"I love her, sir."

"Same here, Jim."

"Do you mind, though?"

"My boy, when I wanted to marry her mother, I jest up an' asked her."

"I'm not good enough for her."

"That's so, and yet I reckon Curly's been dead gentle with you-all. Why, she sure sits on all our haids."

"I'm afraid she doesn't care for me yet."

"I expaict, Jim, that an eye-doctor is what you need."

"And you'll consent?"

"If Curly consents, on one condition. You get her safely out of this country, you take her to civilised life, whar she can stay good, away from us—thieves. Take her to the Old Country."

"To starve!"

"I'll see to that. I've left enough wealth with Chalkeye to give you a start in life. He came down yesterday mawning to see you-all at La Morita—you were out."

"Do you suppose," says Jim, getting hot, "that I'd take your money?"

"If you take my child, yo're not above taking my money, Lord Balshannon!"

Jim pawed his gun—"I take no stolen money!"

"Yo're speaking too loud," says McCalmont, "come over by the corral."

He walked over to the bars of the corral, Jim following.

"And now," McCalmont's voice went softer than ever, "I may allude to the fact that if any cur insults my daughter or me, there is apt to be some unpleasantness."

"Don't you think," says Jim, his hand on his gun, "that we had better go a little further off—so that Curly won't be disturbed when we fire?"

"Why, boy, air you proposin' to dispense yo' gun at me?"

"As you please! You called me a cur—and you'll eat your words or fight!"

"And you only called me a thief! Wall, I shorely am for a fact, and you're not a cur—no. I reckon I was some impulsive in saying that. Come, we won't quar'l, for I like you a whole lot for yo' play-

ing up against me that-a-way. What are yo' plans?"

Jim was breathing hard and acting defiant still. "I want to join your gang!"

"Which I accepts you glad, for I ain't refusing shelter to any hunted man."

"And I may marry Curly?"

"Not if you join my outfit. None of my wolves are invited to offer theyr paws in mar'iage with my Curly. Two or three of them young persons proposed theyrselves, and found my gun a whole lot too contagious for comfort."

Jim unbuckled his belt, and let it fall with holster and gun to the ground.

"I cannot accept the loan of that gun," he said, "or any favour from you. I've been hunted, I'm afoot, I'm unarmed, but now, by thunder! look out for yourself, because I'm going to hunt. I shall rob you if I can; I'm at war with you and every man on the stock range, until I've won back my house, my lands, my cattle. Then I'll come for your daughter, but I won't ask for her!"

McCalmont leaned his shoulder against the corral, and laughed at him.

"Wade in!" says he; "good luck, my boy. I mustn't ask you to divulge yo' plans, but I'm heaps interested."

"My father told me, Captain McCalmont, that all the first Balshannon won he got with the

sword. Well, times are changed—we use revolvers now!"

"Only for robbery, my lad, and for murder. I thought as you do once, and reckoned I'd get even with the world. I started with a lone gun, I sure got even, but see the price I paid. My wife was—I cayn't talk of that. My lil' son was shot. My daughter is herding with thieves—and she's the only thing that I've got left on airth. Come, lad, if I can bear to part with her, and give her up to you, cayn't you give up a little of yo' fool pride and accept her dowry jest to save the child? Take her away to whar she can stay good—I ask no more of you."

"You want me to run away from Ryan, and let him keep Holy Cross? You want me to live in Ireland on a woman's money? You want to hire Lord Balshannon, with stolen money, to keep your daughter?" Jim spat on the ground. "If you want to give Curly to a filthy blackguard, why don't you marry her to Ryan?"

"You use strong words, seh."

"And mean them!"

McCalmont lowered his eyes, and pawed in the dust with his foot. Just for a moment he stood scratching the dust, then he looked up.

"Onced," he said, very quiet, "I aimed at being a gentleman. I beg yo' pardon, seh."

"You are a gentleman," says Jim, "that's just the

worst of it—you understand things. What on earth makes you want to insult me?"

"It seems to me, Jim, that you might understand, more than you do, that I'm aiming to be yo' friend. Yo're at war with this yere Ryan to get back Holy Crawss, or a fair equivalent, eh, for what you've lost?"

"Go on, sir."

"I'm at war, too, with the breed of swine he belongs to. Would you be satisfied if Ryan paid in cash for yo' home, yo' land, and yo' cattle? You being an outlaw now, it wouldn't be healthy to live there to any great extent. Will you take cash?"

"Or blood!"

"I have no speshul use fo' blood. I reckon I'd as soon bleed a polecat as a Ryan, if I yearned for blood. What d'you reckon you could buy with blood—sections of peace, chunks of joy? I'd take mine in cash."

"You'll help, sir?"

"For all young Ryan's worth, and then"—McCalmont laid his hands on Jim's shoulders—"you'll take Curly home as yo' wife, eh, partner?"

"If she is willing, sir."

McCalmont's ears went back against his head, he lifted his nose to the west, pointing up wind. There was a sound like the thud of raindrops on dust, a soft pattering which came nearer and stronger. He loosed off the long yell to rouse the three men who

were resting by the barn, he told Jim to pick up his gun and help, he jumped for the team horses and led them to the buckboard.

The pattering had grown up out of the distance to a steady rush of sound, the ground had begun to quiver, then to shake, then with a yell of warning, Buck and his sentries came thundering in from the desert.

CHAPTER XX

THE MARSHAL'S POSSE

McCALMONT backed his team to the buck-board, lifted the waggon tongue to the ring of the yoke bar, and jumped to hitch on the traces, just as Buck reined all standing to report.

"There's a strong posse," says Buck, "coming out from the Mule Pass—maybe sixty riders, and they're shorely burning the trail straight for this ranche."

"Were you seen?"

"No, seh!"

"Bowlaigs, Johnny, Steve, yo're mounted, so you'll collect the herd, drive north, and keep wide of the trail! Crazy Hoss, hold this team! Doc, throw my saddle on that sorrel, and lead north; Buck, make the camp search, and follow, closing all signs 'cept the wheel-track! Jim, help the herders! Git a move on!"

McCalmont had got through with the harnessing while he slung his orders; now he went to work smooth and quiet, pulling on his shaps (leather leg-armour) and buckling his spurs while his cool eye searched the yard.

"Buck," he called, "let the water drain out of that hoss trough. That water wouldn't look natural on an empty ranche."

McCalmont brought Curly in his arms, bedded her down in the rig, drew the ground-sheet over to keep off sun and dust, and passed a lashing across.

After that he locked the door of the cabin, and hung the key on its nail. It was just that thoughtfulness in little plays which made McCalmont loom up great in his business. Two minutes after the first alarm he grabbed the reins, jumped to his seat, and drove off slow from the yard, aiming to show by the tracks that Cocky Brown's old buckboard had not pulled out in a hurry. Buck and Crazy Hoss stayed to brush out a few spare tracks, put up the slip rails and follow. For all one could see at the little *ranchita* La Soledad, the owner, Cocky Brown, had trailed off for supplies to the city, then a couple of riders had happened along shortly after, and read the notice which was left for "Dere Bill" on the door.

McCalmont just poured his whip into the team as Buck came up abreast.

"All set?" he asked.

"All set, seh."

"Can we get behind them hills befo' we're seen by the posse?"

Buck looked back to the boys who were sweating the herd astern. "Yes," he shouted, "I reckon.

You done right smart, seh, to get Curly out 'n that mess."

"You'll be pleased to know, Buck, that my Curly is engaged to be mar'ied to this du Chesnay colt."

Buck's face went white, but he just spurred along saying nothing. A fold of the ground shut out the ranche behind, a hill barred off the country to the left, and, if the posse could see the dust of the flying outfit, they might well mistake that for one of the whirlwinds which curve around the desert wherever the sun burns strong.

"Buck," says McCalmont, "reach back to the skyline, and see if that posse puts out on our trail from the ranche. At dusk I quit this Tombstone road, and strike due east. If yo're delayed, jest roll yo' tail right east for Holy Crawss. In the mawning we round up all the stock we can find thar, and pull out for home. You understand?"

"I understand," says Buck, and swung off for the skyline.

The breaking out of evil passions between the cowboys and the Tombstone citizens opened my eye to the fact that this city was getting a whole lot obsolete since the mines began to peter out. Its population of twelve thousand assorted criminals had shrunken away to mere survivals living to save the expense of funeral pomps. Counting in tramps, tourists, and quite a few dogs, expected visitors and

the dear departed, these ruins claimed a population of one thousand persons, mostly escaped from penitentiary. It made me feel lonesome to think of such a tribe with its mean ways, distorted intellects, and narrow views about me.

On the other hand, there was Bisbee, a sure live mining town in the Mule Pass, where the people were youthful, happy, and sympathetic. After that melancholy victory of mine at La Morita I came butting along to Bisbee, where I reckoned I could have a glass of lager beer without being shot to any great extent. Besides that, United States Marshal Hawkins lives there, who's always been a white man and a good friend to me. I found his house away up the gulch, above Bisbee City, and he being to home, just whirled right in, telling him how sick my heart was, and how my fur was all bristles.

He said he was disgusted with me for getting mixed up with local politics and robbers.

Naturally I explained how I'd only been acting as second in a duel between Balshannon and that Ryan.

He agreed I was modest in the way I put my case, and that I ought to be hanged some in the public interest.

"How about the robbers?" says he.

"Is there robbers about?" says I. "Is thar really now?"

He snapped out news of the La Morita raid that

very morning, and I own up I was shocked all to pieces when he told me what had happened to those fragile guards.

"Why, man," says he, "it's all your doing, and I had to wire for the dog-gone cavalry."

"Cavalry?" says I. "Pore things; d'you reckon they'll get sore feet?"

"I opine," says the Marshal, "that you'll get a sore neck soon and sudden, you double-dealing, cattle-stealing, hoss thief. Whar do you think you'll go to when you're lynched?"

So he went on denouncing around until it was time to eat, then asked me to dinner. After that Mrs. Hawkins was plenty abusive too, close-herding me until supper, when the Marshal came home. Hawkins, thoughtful to keep me out of mischief, made me bed down for the night in his barn; and I made no howl because here at Bisbee, close to the boundary, I would get the first news of Jim and Curly. It made me sick to think how helpless I was to find them. In the morning a squadron of cavalry arrived by rail, had coffee in town, and trailed off in their harmless way to patrol the boundary for fear of somebody stealing Mexico. I lay low, but mended a sewing machine which had got the fantods, according to Mrs. Hawkins. I treated the poor thing for inflammation of the squeam until it got so dead I couldn't put it together any more. My mind was all set on my lost kids out yonder in the desert,

but Mrs. Hawkins grieved for the dead machine, and chased me out of the house.

Just then came the Marshal swift back from Bisbee town on a bicycle.

"Say, Chalkeye," he yelled, "I want you to saddle my mare, and get mounted yourself! *Pronto!*"

When I came out with the horses I found him fondling his shot-gun, so I buckled on my guns, and inquired for the name of my enemy.

"You know Cocky Brown?" he asked, as we rode down street.

"I know he makes a first-rate stranger," says I.

"His dog-gone son is here in Bisbee drunk, and lets out that old Cocky is getting rent for La Soledad."

"Who is the locoed tenant—some poor tourist?"

"It's that dog-gone McCalmont and his robbers!"

"And yet, Mr. Hawkins, you laid the blame on me for raiding La Morita! It makes me sick!"

"For raiding La Morita? Why, of course—McCalmont's robbers—the same gang which shot up the 'Sepulchre' crowd at Tombstone. That explains everything! Wall, I'm sure sorry, old friend, that I laid the blame on you."

"Mr. Hawkins," says I, "hadn't you better tell the pony-soldiers that they're barking up the wrong tree?"

"I will, and get their help in surprising that dog-gone McCalmont at La Soledad. A good idea."

That was his idea, not mine, and I disown it. Suppose that Jim and Curly were hid up there at La Soledad?

"We can get them or'nary hold-ups," says I indignant, "without being cluttered with a heap of military infants. Why, your half-fledged, moulting cavalry would just get right in our way by tumbling all over theirselves."

In the town we found the citizens surging around for encouraging liquors before they hit the trail. They were all bristling with pocket-flasks and artillery, some on mules, some on sore-back plugs from the livery stable. Besides that there were heroes in sulkies, and dog-traps, and buckboards, warriors on bicycles, and three on a pioneer motor-car, which blew up with a loud explosion in front of the Turkish Divan. Mixed in with that milling herd were seven of my La Morita raiders, howling for robbers' blood, and gassing about the disgracefulness of molesting frontier guards. Then they circled round a tenderfoot on a pinto horse, and told him how the robbers fed red-hot coals to a prisoner.

"Wall, I admire!" says the shorthorn.

"Oh, you needn't believe me," says lying Ike, "ask Chalkeye here. He's truthful."

"Stranger," says I, "allow me to introduce you to Mr. Lying Ike. He has an impediment in his truth, but otherwise will survive until he's lynched. Now,

seh, the Marshal over yonder says that he yearns for your advice."

That tenderfoot loped off joyful to teach the United States Marshal, while I spoke to my cowboys like a father.

"You moth-eaten bookworms," says I, "your stories is prehistoric, and your lies is relics. Now you want to encourage them pore toorists, 'cause we needs them. Toorists graze out slothful on the trail, they're noisy to warn their prey, and they flit like bats as soon as a robber shoots. Send all the toorists you can to tell good advice to Marshal Hawkins quick. As to the real folks who kin ride and shoot, beguile 'em to feed, lead 'em up against the fire-water, scatter 'em, delay! This Marshal needs our help, you blighted sufferers. Do you want the Marshal to get Jim and pore Curly McCalmont, you idiots?"

So we scattered to help the Marshal, sending him earnest talkers while his fighting-men went off and lost themselves.

Did I act mean? I wonder sometimes whether I done right for Jim, for Curly.

Dog-gone Hawkins was as mad as a wet hen, too hoarse for further comments when, after a couple of hours, he rode off alone to hunt robbers; so we had to follow to save the old man from being shot. I came up abreast as soon as I could, and in a voice all hushed into whispers, he just invoked black saints and little red angels to comfort me on a grid.

I reckon it was four o'clock when our circus, all hot and dusty after a ten-mile ride, charged down upon La Soledad. The place looked so blamed peaceful that the Marshal stared pop-eyed.

"Wall, I'll be dog-goned!" says he, and let us riders traffick around innocent, trampling out all the ground sign. When he saw Cocky's memorandum on the door of the shack he couldn't bear it any longer.

"Chalkeye," says he, "I'll be dog-goned if that ain't—'Gawn with the buckboard for grub.' If that ain't enough to scorch a yaller dawg!"

"And yet," says I, "you blamed us for hanging back!"

"Wall," he groaned, "the drinks is on me this time. Let's go home."

But I knew Jim's handwriting, I knew that he and Curly were with the buckboard, I knew that the brains of McCalmont himself were behind a play like this.

I looked up the Tombstone trail, the way to my ranche, the way that the buckboard had gone with my kids.

"You may go home, sir," says I, "but I'm off to my home before you leads me any more astray, corrupting my pure morals."

Dog-gone Hawkins froze me with his eyes. "Ef your soul," he says, "were to stray out on to your dog-goned cheek it would get lost!"

I'm always getting misunderstood like that by people who ought to know better. You see, I had to shock old Hawkins, or he would notice at once that I aimed to follow the buckboard.

"Cyclists," says I, "dawg-traps, sulkies, buggies, waggons, soreback horses, mules, tenderfeet—look at yo' circus and say if that ain't enough to corrupt a long-horn's morals. Hello, look at that!"

A man was coming down from the north, lickety spit on a roan with a rangy stride. He wore sombrero, shirt, shaps with streaming fringes, a brace of guns to his belt. He rode with a cowboy swing to his broad shoulders, and his face was black with rage as he pulled up facing our crowd—guns drawn for war.

"Boys," he shouted, "whar's yo' sheriff?"

I followed Hawkins as he rode up to confront the stranger.

"I'm United States Marshal Hawkins. What's your dog-goned business that needs drawn guns?"

"I'm Buck Hennesy, segundo to the Robbers' Roost gang of outlaws, and my guns are to shoot if I see you flirt that smoothbore."

"Your business?"

"State's evidence—take it or leave it!"

"And who's your dog-goned evidence against?"

"Against Captain McCalmont, Curly his—his son, and six others, robbers, and that polecat Jim du Chesnay, of Holy Crawss."

"Wall, throw down your dog-goned guns, throw up your dog-goned hands, and say 'Sir' when you dare to address an honest man. Now you get off'n that horse!"

"Dog-goned Hawkins," says the robber, "I ain't no prisoner, I ain't yo' meat, I don't propose to hole up in yo' flea-trap calaboose, and I quit this hawss when I'm daid. Take my talk for State's evidence, or go without!"

"Chalkeye," says the Marshal aside, "is he covered?"

"Say the word, and I drop him."

"All right. Now, Hennesy, at the first break you die. You may talk."

"McCalmont's outfit," says Buck, "is breaking for Holy Crawss. To-morrow mawning they round up cattle, and then they drive right home to Robbers' Roost."

"You're going to guide us, Mr. dog-goned Robber, or get plugged as full of holes as a dog-goned sieve."

"Guide you?" says Buck, and spat at him. "Guide you? I wouldn't be seen daid with yo' tin-horn crowd of measly, bedridden toorists. I cayn't insult you worse than saying that yo' mother was a sport, yo' father hung, and their offspring a skunk. Now all you deck of cowards——"

He let drive with both his guns, but I shot first, and only just in time. One bullet grazed my ear, the other killed a horse; but my shot had done its work

and spoiled his aim. His eyes rolled up white, his face went dead, he sat there a corpse in the saddle for maybe a minute, until I yelled, and the horse shied, and the body lurched forward, crashing to the ground, splashing a cloud of dust which was red with the sunset.

"HE SAT THERE A CORPSE"

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CHAPTER XXI

A FLYING HOSPITAL

CAPTAIN McCALMONT, away north on the trail, pulled up at a bend of the hill.

"Doc," he called out to the man with the led horse astern, "jest you hitch that sorrel of mine to the tail of this rig. That's right, my son; now find out if Buck stays at the skyline or goes buttin' straight back to the ranche."

"All right, Cap."

When he was gone, Curly rucked up the canvas ground-sheet, climbed out of bed, and nestled against her father's side on the seat.

"Havin' a bad time?" he asked, as he drove on.

"Sure."

"You heard what I told to Buck?"

"Buck's gawn back to betray the outfit."

"So I reckon."

Curly got her father's near arm around her, shivering while she looked all round at the dusky hills, up to the red of the sunset. Then she listened to the thud of Doc's horse as he galloped back to report.

"Cap," says the man, "Buck's gawn straight away to the ranche."

"That's good," McCalmont chuckled; "you see, Doc, I've sent Buck to lead that sheriff's posse to Holy Crawss. We've got to work to-night, and ain't hungering none for their company. D'you know the Jim Crow Mine?"

"I guess that's the old shaft a mile this side of Tombstone?"

"Correct. Now you lope off to the boys we left in camp at Las Aguas. Tell Stanley he's second in command now. He's to round up his boys, herd 'em close, and drive 'em swift to the Jim Crow Mine. Now repeat my awdehs."

Doc repeated the orders.

"Now," says the Captain, "ride!"

Doc started off on the dead run, and for a while Curly watched his figure flopping away into the blue mists of dusk. The night was falling fast.

"Po' Buck," she whispered.

"I'm sorry, too," says McCalmont; "sooner or later he had to be a skunk, and behave as such."

"He's daid," says Curly. "I heard him die just now, and he did love me so hard."

"The trail is clearing ahead for you, my girl."

"I'm sort of tired," she answered.

"You'll rest to-night."

"Father, when you was talking with Jim outside the shack I was awake; I heard all what was said,

but couldn't understand. Jim wanted suthin' fearful bad. What was it he wanted, dad?"

"Wall, now, if that don't beat all! You jest got ears like a lil' fox! And didn't I act plumb good and tame with that Jim boy?"

"Which you shorely did. Fancy, you taking all that war-talk, and never even shooting his laigs. Yo're getting better'n better every day."

"I was good, that's a fact. You see, I nacherally couldn't lose my temper without disturbing you with my gun-talk. Besides, I jest cayn't help loving that Jim. You want him, Curly?"

"Sure, I don't know what's coming over me the way I feels at that man. It seems as though my heart was pitchin' and buckin' like a mean hawss to get at Jim. D'you think it's this wound that tears my heart—is it 'cause I'm so sick?"

"It's worse nor that, my girl. You've fallen in love."

"Does that mean I got to marry him?"

"That's the only cure."

"But I don't want to be cured. I like it, dad, and when it hurts I like it all the more."

"A sure bad symptom that. You'll go with Jim?"

"To the end of the world, and over the edge—I cayn't help that."

"You don't love me any more?"

"Oh, yo're allus the same, like the climate—but

he's come buttin' along like the weather, so that I feels as if I was just whirled up in the air."

"I was an idiot to think I could fool old Nature, and make you into a man. Wall, it cayn't be helped."

"Daddy, I never was fit to ride with the gang, and I doubt I'll never be fit for a woman either, now. I'm shorely tired, and my haid goes round and round."

McCalmont stopped the team and laid Curly down in her nest. He told me after that he felt lonesome and scared, with all his nerves a-jumping for fear there was something worse than usual wrong. He felt Curly's bandages, and his hand got wet; then listened, and heard a drip, drip, drip, on the dust, then struck a match and saw the running blood, for her wound had opened. He had to light a lantern, no matter what the risk, while he stopped that bleeding.

Meanwhile the Marshal had started his circus east towards Holy Cross, and he was having troubles most plentiful with all his warriors. He held us in the name of the Republic for special service in pursuit of robbers, but his tenderfoot outfit was badly in want of supper, and the cowboy people got plumb disgusted at having to ride, point, swing, and drive on a herd of shorthorns. I'd shown my hand in this game by shooting Buck, the same being needful to save the old Marshal's life, and I sure helped him all I knew in getting the posse on towards Holy Crawss. At the same time my private feelings

called me off to quite a different lay-out, and I knew, all to myself, that Buck might have been mistaken a whole lot in his way of reckoning up McCalmont's plans. So I fell back to give a push to some stragglers, then fell back again to see if there was any more belated pilgrims behind. The light had faded, the stars were beginning to ride herd on the Milky Way, and I felt a sort of dumb yearning to find McCalmont. An hour later, scouting swift and cautious up the Tombstone road, I saw a lantern bobbing high up among the hills. That must be a bait, I thought, to lure the Marshal's posse into some robbers' deadfall, so I rode slow, and sang my simple range songs to show it was only me, one harmless person.

"Ip-e-la-go, go 'long little doggie,
You'll make a beef steer, by-and-by."

That's the rear song for driving a herd. This is nonsense:—

"Two little niggers upstairs in bed—
One turned ober to de oder and said:
'How 'bout dat short'nin' bread?
How 'bout dat short'nin' bread?'"

A voice called out of the dark, "Throw up yo' hands!"

Up went my paws. "Hello, boys," I shouted, "is this the inquiry office? I wants my visitin' cyard sent up to Cap McCalmont."

Somebody laughed, and then I heard Jim's voice. "Why, it's Chalkeye!"

"Well, if he don't want to be shot he'd better turn right back."

'Jest you tell yo' hold-ups, Jim," says I, "that them leaden go-through pills don't suit my delicate health." I dropped my hands, and the first robber asked Jim if he would answer for me.

Jim said he would.

"Take this man through," said the robber, and Jim led me, mighty pleased, to where the lantern shone.

"Captain," says he, "here's old Chalkeye!"

McCalmont jumped down from the buckboard, holding out his lantern. "Wall," says he, "I'm glad to see ye, Misteh Davies, I certainly am—shake hearty. Whar you from?"

"Is Curly with you?"

"Here's me," came a faint chirp out of the bedding.

"Her wound broke out agin," says McCalmont.

"*Her* wound?" I howled.

"Wall, that cat is shorely spilled," says McCalmont, and so I knew for the first time that my Curly wasn't a boy, but come of a different creed of people altogether. I slid from my horse, and sat down on a rock to unravel my mixed emotions.

"If that's the truth," I says, "I spose I may turn out to be a widow, the same being some confusing to the mind."

"Wall, Mrs. Davies," says McCalmont, "I was

goin' to propose that you act as a sort of chaperon to Curly."

"I rise to inquire," says I, "if that's some new kind of mountain sheep." The name was new to me, and I felt suspicious.

"A mountain sheep," says McCalmont, "is a cimmeron, but a chaperon's defined as a party which rides herd on girls to proteck them in society."

"Meaning that this carousing around in a waggon ain't good for wounds?"

"Not when the hawspital has to gallop over rocks."

"Seems to me," says I, "that right apart from bullet-holes in a lady, he'll need home comforts more'n an or'nary robber."

"Kin you take Curly home, then?"

"I'm getting unpopular," says I. "My home ain't fortified much." I rolled a cigarette to think with. "Whereas I got some cousins which is ladies, the Misses Jameson. Their home is just the other side of the Jim Crow Mine, between that and Tombstone, and they has a fancy for stray cats, dawgs, and outcasts generally. Seems to me, though, they'd be mighty near surprised if I played a wounded robber on them, calling the same a female. They ain't broke in to lady outlaws damaged in gun-fights yet. They're plumb respectable, and frequents the Episcopal Church. The bishop boards thar when he happens around, and they'll take up with any litter of passing curates."

"I'm scart," says Curly. "Cayn't you bed me down in yo' barn?"

"You'll go whar yo' told," says McCalmont, "and stay put until yo're well enough to fight."

"If you're scared, Curly," says I, "these same ladies is due to have fits at the sight of yo' present costume. Now, if I could show them a case like you in the Bible they'd think it right natural, and all correct."

"Absalom," says Curly, "had long ha'r."

"So does Buffalo Bill, Texas Bob, and other old longhorns, but the same ain't lady robbers. Besides, yo' ha'r is short, and you're plumb unusual."

"I got a trunk full of female plunder," says McCalmont, "and it's right here in the buckboard, in case he needs to dress respectable."

"It's all tawn to rags," said Curly, "from that last b'ar hunt when I was treed by a grizzly. And the wig got stuck full of pine gum."

"These details of female dress and depawtment" —McCalmont was getting restive—"seems to me to be some frivolous. The question is, Do these yere ladies run much to tongue?"

"Wall, no; the fashionable society of Tombstone has struck them reticent. Miss Blossom says she'd rather mix up with bears, and Miss Pansy she allows our crowd lacks tone. No, these ladies don't go henning around to cackle."

"That settles it," says McCalmont. "Now you,

Jim, you go back and tell these boys to join the herders in front, and I'll be with you presently. It ain't decent, my boy, for you to behold what's going to happen in the way of costume. So you jest tell Curly good-bye, and we'll proceed with disguisin' her as a womern."

"When shall I see Curly again?" asks Jim in a fright.

"At such time when he's fit to ride. Now tell yo' good-bye."

So Jim and Curly had a minute together while I helped McCalmont to get out the trunk of clothes. Then Jim rode off for the sake of decency, and I turned my back. There was arguments between McCalmont and Curly about how the female costume should be fixed, the parent wanting one side to the front, and the dutiful child insisting otherwise. When I was told to look, there was Curly grinning in surroundings of yellow wig, the same being bunched up behind like a clump of prickly pear. McCalmont rigged himself out in his preacher clothes, cinched up his sorrel horse at the tail of the buckboard, and tied his cowboy gear to the strings of the saddle. He turned to watch Jim and the robbers file past on their way to the front, then gave me his lantern.

"My friend," says he, "when you go to the home of them ladies, drive straight acrost the open range to the back door, be thar befo' midnight, and if you

love yo' life, don't stray out on to the waggon road between the Jim Crow Mine and Tombstone. If you do you'll get killed for sure."

"What shall I do with the buckboard?"

"Lose it somewheres whar it ain't apt to be found. Turn them team hawsses loose and let them break for their home, as they shorely will."

"And when Curly is well of this wound?"

"Then Jim will join you, and you'll take them children to some safe country, so that they get mar'ied and forget this life. We planned all that befo'."

"You trust me still?"

"It looks that way, my friend, and I don't trust by halves."

He gripped my hand, and went loping away into the night.

CHAPTER XXII

ROBBERY-UNDER-ARMS

IN those days of our little unpleasantness in Arizona there was another discussion proceeding along in South Africa. The Boers had their tail up, and the British Army was indulging itself in "regrettable incidents" about once a week. Which I allude to here because the word "regrettable incident" is good; it's soothing, and it illustrates exactly what happened on the night when I delivered Curly, damaged but cheerful, among my cousins the Misses Jameson.

Just to the east of the home inhabited by these ladies occurs the Jim Crow Mine, the same being the very place where the robbers once had breakfast with old man Ryan, making him pay the bill, as aforesaid, which was seventy-five thousand dollars, and annoying.

On this further occasion which I now unfold, there were only four men working the Jim Crow claim. It seems they were in the bunk house playing poker until eleven p.m., when their foreman uprose with regrets to surrender his hat, boots, and pants to an

avaricious person holding three aces and a pair of jacks. The foreman's warm communications on the subject of cheating were then cut off short by a masked robber standing in the doorway with guns. This robber proposed that all gentlemen present should throw up their hands, and allowed they had a fervent invitation to die unless they stepped out pretty soon to the head of the Jim Crow shaft. Accordingly the sad procession trailed away to the shaft, and one by one the mourners went down in a bucket to a total depth of one hundred and four feet. Then the robber hauled up the bucket to keep them from straying out, and promised faithful that if he heard any noise he would just drop in a few sticks of dynamite. There was not much noise.

Meanwhile other earnest young robbers were collecting every citizen who passed the mine, and inviting him to join their surprise-party down at the foot of the shaft. The citizens all accepted, and when some candles, a deck of cards, and a few bottles of nose paint were sent to assist, the levée underground began to get quite a success.

Mixed in with these proceedings, and other hold-ups various and swift, was the Chinese cook with a robber holding his tail while he fixed supper for twenty-five men. Afterwards he likewise was handed down the shaft. I should also mention a preacher in a black suit, and a white tie up under his ear, pro-

jecting around among the store shed for cases of dynamite.

At 12.30 a bunch of cowboys numbering eighteen head, with a cavvyard of ponies, trailed in off the range. After each man had roped and saddled a fresh horse, and fed corn to the same, their reverend pastor put out a relief of sentries, and told the crowd to line up in the rampasture for supper.

Naturally these people had to get the provisions off their minds before there was any talk, but then the preacher reared up to address the meeting.

"Brethren——" says he.

"Look a-here," the new segundo, Black Stanley, started in obstreperous, backed by a dozen men, all seething. "I represents this outfit in starting to buck right now!"

"Turn yo'self loose."

"We-all has come to an understanding that we ain't a-goin' to fool around here any more. These is mean pastures, and we breaks for home."

"That's what's the matter!" A lot of robbers began to come to a crisis.

"Misteh Stanley, seh," says McCalmont, "you air a judge of rye whisky, and a natural bawn leader of men."

The boys began to laugh.

"Now," says McCalmont, "all you boys who yearns to get quit of me, and have this judge of rye, and natural bawn leader of men to be they'r chief, will

arise and join his herd. Yo' hawsses are at the door, so trail yo' spurs along the floor and go!"

Not a man moved.

"You, Black Stanley, take yo'self and yo' followers, and get absent quick from this camp, 'cause the rest of us has business."

Stanley, getting to feel a whole lot lonesome, just dropped his tail, and submitted. "Chief," says he, "I take it all back."

"I made you my segundo, Stanley, and you've proved yo'self mighty sudden. I reduce you to the ranks. You, Bowlaigs, act as second in command. And now to business.

"First, I want to instil into yo' dim and clouded intellecks that when a member of the gang is captured he has to be rescued. The captured man was my son, and seventeen skunks of you hung fire when I asked for his rescue. These seventeen said skunks is fined half theyr shares of plunder in the next raiding, the same to be paid to those who do most work. Second, the man who rescued my son is Jim du Chesnay here." The Captain laid his hand upon Jim's shoulder. "He is my guest, and as he's not a member of this or'nary low-flung herd, you don't want to tell him awdehs, or oppress him, or stuff his haid with any of yo' dreams. I've a mind to muzzle a few pet liars right now. The speshul liars I see grinning is the ones I allude to particular.

"Now you-all is a mighty sight wide of bein'

perfect thieves; you has weaknesses, some for bad liquor, some for small mean thefts, most for showin' yo'selves off 'sif you was buck-devils, which you shorely ain't. To-night I propose you fast from such-like vanities, and attend strictly to business. Moreover, as some of you ain't got no more sense than a poached cat, I now explains this warpath, lest you get wandering around after the wrong scalp. The objec' of this virtuous night is to steal a millionaire which goes by the name of Michael Ryan, and holes up in a palace cyar on the railroad sidings. If you get him in reasonable preservation, we realise lots of wealth for his ransom; but any blamed fool who spoils him with loose ammunition is robbing his partners of theyr lawful dues."

And so, having tamed his wolves, McCalmont gave the orders for the night.

Right here I bubble over with remarks on the art of being a villain.

Now this Captain McCalmont wasn't a good man exactly, it being his humble vocation to steal everything in sight, and shoot any party who happened to get in the way. He was a sure enough scoundrel, and yet Curly just loved him frantic. Jim trusted him body and soul. I was mighty proud of having his friendship. All his wolves were tame as little children when he led them; every cowboy on the range would have shared his last drop of water with old McCalmont, and even the victims he robbed

would speak of him mostly as a perfect gentleman. When he laid a trap that same deadfall looked a whole lot attractive and comforting. "'Scuse me," says McCalmont, springing the steel jaws on his victim, "I hope yo're not feeling hurt?"

Now if McCalmont had looked like one of them villains I see at the theatre, scowling, threatening, lurid, mean-eyed scareheads, he wouldn't have seen the victim's tail for dust. No, he wasn't like a villain, he was like a man—a white man at that—and when he gave a show it was worth any man's money to see. Just watch his play.

Tombstone was a plenty big city to attack; it could turn out three hundred riders, anyway, and that mighty sudden, too, in case of robbers. McCalmont had to attack with twenty-four outlaws, and get them away without any holes through their hides.

Along towards one in the morning the stable-man at Ryan's livery met with an accident, being clubbed. Then a couple of men walked round the stalls, loosed all the horses, and drove the whole outfit away through the back gate. The same proceedings occurred at the Spur livery, and in all the large stables, until two hundred head of good stock were gathered and run off to the northward.

In Main Street, hitched to the snubbing posts, stood a score of saddled horses, a waiting patient to take their drunkards home. These poor creatures

were cared for tender by a young man who went along casual, feeding them each a bunch of dry herbs, the same being *loco* weed, and a heaps powerful medicine. Now we turn to the railroad station, where the main game was being played.

At one a.m. the night operator in the depôt remembered all of a sudden that the lady clerk, Miss Brumble, at Contention, had wired him to send on a parcel of stockings by Number 4. The night freight train was pulling out at the time, so he ran across the platform and pitched the parcel into the caboose as the cars went rolling past him. "Miss Brumble's socks!" says he.

"All correct!" says the conductor; and the train went rumbling off into the desert. Then the night operator—which his name was Bowles—turned round to point back for his office, and suddenly trod on a preacher.

"Pardon me," says the reverend stranger.

"Oh, don't mention it," says the clerk, some sarcastic.

"'Scuse me, seh, may I venture to——"

"Well, what's the matter with you?"

"My poor lost brother, I am wishful to be infawmed if Misteh Michael Ryan——"

"He's in his car. I'm busy."

"Oh, but my deah young friend, these profane cowboys are using such feahful language, because Misteh Ryan refuses to see them, being gawn to bed——"

The operator turned on his heel, and turned off growsing.

"You see," the preacher wailed after him, "they've got a robber."

The operator began to nibble the bait.

"Robber!" He swung round sudden. "What robber?"

"The erring young person is called James du Chesnay."

"They've got him? Great snakes!"

"Yes, in bondage. They want to be rewarded with earthly dross, instead of seeking for the blessings and comfort which alone——"

"And Ryan won't come out?"

"I think, seh, that Misteh Ryan is timid, bekase of the shocking profanity of these misguided men, breaking his windows, too. Let me admonish you, my brother, to eschew the company of all——"

"I'll fix him," says the operator, and charged along down the platform with the preacher suffering after him.

That night operator, Mr. Mose Bowles, surging along the platform to Ryan's car, would have bet his last dollar that the facts were true. He saw three sure-enough cowboys sitting their horses easy in front of the private car, and the preacher was plumb correct about the way they talked. Bowles saw the prisoner, bound hand and foot on a led horse, and that was Jim beyond all doubt, looking plenty dis-

couraged. Bowles knew that Ryan had offered rewards most bounteous for Jim's body; he hungered for a portion of the plunder, and when he swung himself up the platform on the end of the car his batterings on the door was full of enthusiasm.

"I feah," says the preacher, "that yo're spoiling the paint. Take thought, my friend, how expensive is paint like that!"

The cowboys were backing their horses away beyond range of the car lamps, out of sight.

"Mr. Ryan!" Bowles shouted, "urgent telegrams! Come out!"

A nigger porter slid open an inch of the door. "You go way," says he; "Mass' Ryan he plumb distrackful. Go 'way."

"Let me in, you fool!"

Bowles wrenched the door wide open, and jumped into the car; then there were mutterings and voices, the lighting up of the far end of the Pullman; and after a while came a fat young man bustling out on the platform. He wore a fur coat, bare legs, and slippers, cussing around most peevish.

"'Scuse me," says the preacher, "I am an unworthy minister, a 'Ticular Baptist, and I could not heah the feahful profanity of these rude men without shedding tears. May I esco't you, seh, to see this prisoner?"

Bowles and the negro stood on the car platform watching, while the preacher led Ryan off into starlight.

" My heart quakes at the feah that these cowboys have gawn away. Please step this way—and 'ware stumbling on these sidings—this way, Misteh Ryan—this way——"

The voice died away, and Bowles was putting out to follow, when all of a sudden he and the negro were seized from behind, gagged, roped, and generally detained. Off among the sidings Mr. Ryan had a gag in his mouth, a rope round his elbows; then felt himself caught up into the starlight and thrown on a horse while his feet were hobbled under the animal's belly. In the station a robber was playing tunes with an axe on the keys of the telegraph, and the wires were being lopped with a pair of shears. Speaking generally, a whole lot of silence was being procured, and from a robber point of view things worked harmonious until the first bunch of riders went thundering away into the desert.

As it happened, the City Marshal and his deputy, Shorty Broach, straying into these premises to send off a telegram, found the operator and the negro lying gagged and bound on the platform; so when they heard the robbers loping off they sized up the whole situation. They were just too late to get robbers, but plenty swift in turning out the town.

This news of a fresh outrage hit old Tombstone sudden, surprising, right in the middle of sleep time, and the whole town swarmed out instant like a hornets' nest for war. Some of the people were full

of sleep, others were full of whisky; some had their war-paint, some had a blanket; but all of them felt they were spat on, all of them howled for vengeance. For a whole week the town tribe and the range tribe had been at war, and here was some idiot making a howl about robbers! This was certainly another case of cowboys in town, and the verdict was sudden—to lynch the cowboy leader, Mr. Chalkeye Davies.

It being some expedient first to catch this Chalkeye, these warriors began to make haste and get mounted for pursuit. But from the first things seemed to go wrong, for one after another the horses which had been standing in the street went jumping roaring crazy, pulling back till their reins broke, bucking off their saddles, whirling around the town, and stampeding away to the desert. The people saw that *loco* weed had been prevailing over the plain sense of these animals; then they found the stables an aching solitude, and the telegraph wrecked to prevent them calling for help, and everything done thoughtful and considerate by felonious parties unknown who had stolen the only millionaire in Arizona. Soon they remembered there had been a whole lot of unpleasantness between Mr. Ryan and Chalkeye. Thus the more they considered, the more their noses went sideways of the truth, smelling the poisonous iniquities of this Chalkeye outlaw.

The town was left afoot, and yet from private stables horses were raked up, enough to mount a

posse of thirty men. By this time it was too late to chase, but the Marshal reckoned that, with a shine of bicycle lamps, he could track until daylight, and keep on the robbers' trail until he got more help. He never ruminated on the thoughtful, prophetic way in which these motions were foreseen. Just abreast of the Jim Crow Mine the leading horse of that posse blew up with a loud bang, and Shorty Broach was projected into a prickly-pear bush. That is how he got his new pseudonym, which is Pincushion Shorty to the present day. On the whole that posse concluded to go home rather than face a pavement of live dynamite.

CHAPTER XXIII

A HOUSE OF REFUGE

LOOKING back upon the whole discussion between the du Chesnay and Ryan families, I see myself sitting around meek and patient, shy, timid, cautious, and fearfully good, and yet I got all the blame. Of course, I ought to have shot old man Ryan just as an early precaution, so it's best to own up that I was all in the wrong for dallying. But after that, there was the massacre of the leading Tombstone felons; I got the blame. Next came the hunting and escape of Curly and Jim; I got the blame. Furthermore, there was the flight of Curly and Jim from La Morita prison, followed by business transactions with the Frontier Guards; I got the blame. And, moreover, there was the sliding out of Curly, Jim, and the robbers from Cocky Brown's ranche at La Soledad, with certain vain pursuits by a posse of citizens; I got the blame. Lastly, there was the stealing of all the horses and a millionaire out of Tombstone; I got the blame. Whatever happened, I always got the blame. It's plumb ridiculous.

Now, taking this last case, what ground is there for supposing that I helped McCalmont's robbers? My movements all that night were innocent and unobtrusive travels. When Dog-gone Hawkins went off with his tenderfoot posse to hunt ghosts, I naturally slid out for home. So I met up with McCalmont, took charge of Cocky Brown's old buckboard, and delivered Curly at the back door of my cousins, the Misses Jameson. These ladies had to hear a whole lot which was pretty near true about poor Curly, and that consumed some time. Afterwards they got scared all to fits by rushes of horsemen, dynamite explosions, and such diverting accidents, ending with the arrival of Shorty Broach to have his prickles pulled. Through this disturbance I hid up with Curly in a cellar, and when there was peace drove off alone, with my saddled horse tied behind the buckboard. After an hour's search, I found the old Cœur d'Alene Mine shaft, and tipped the buckboard in, turning the team horses loose to graze their way back to La Soledad. My duties being all performed, I rode back just before dawn to my own home pasture at Las Salinas. There is the whole annals of a virtuous night, and yet these Tombstone idiots defamed my character, which it makes me sick.

There's a habit which I caught from the old patrone at Holy Cross, the same being to have a cold bath. Our Arizona water is mostly too rich for

bathing, being made of mud, cow-dung, alkali, and snakes; but at Las Salinas I owned a little spring, quite good for washing and such emergencies. After my bath I felt skittish, a whole lot younger than usual, full of aching memories about getting no supper last night, and pleased all to pieces to hear the breakfast-howl. These symptoms being observed, Custer proposed at once that I pay up the overdue wages, and Ute backed his play, grinning ugly. As for Monte, he was chipped in the face with a recent bullet, and squatted heaps thoughtful over his pork and beans.

"So you-all wants yo' pay?"

They agreed that they did, and Custer passed me the biggest cup for my coffee.

"All right, you tigers," says I, "after this grub-pile we'll cyclone into town and catch what I've got in the bank."

"I ain't no tiger this time," says Ute. "Why, yesterday I just rode up street to collect my washing, and the weather was a lot too prevalent."

"Rain?" says I. "You shorely didn't have rain!"

"Wall, it splashed up the dust all around me, it did that," says Ute, "but I sorter mistook it for bullets."

Then those boys allowed that we was getting some unpopular in town, but they had a gnawing awful pain in their pants pockets, and nothing would

cure that but wages. They were sure good boys, and it made me ache inside to see them want.

"You boys," says I, "spose you collect these here wages yo'selves and make yo're own settlement?"

"As how?" this Ute inquires, his homely face twisting around into strange new species of grins.

"Why, you-all knows every hawss I got, and has yo' notions of value. Jest you whirl right in, boys, and take what's coming to you in hawsses instead of cash. Pay yo'selves liberal, and I'll sign the bills."

"Shame!" says Monte. "D'ye think we'd take yo' pets?"

In the end we agreed to go into partnership, the which we did, for those boys were as good as brothers from the moment I got into trouble. Monte is my partner still.

Now, in course of these details, while we sat smoking cigarettes around the door of the cabin, we saw a sort of dust-cloud come rolling along out of the city.

"Which reminds me," says Ute, "that the Tombstone stranglers was proposing yesterday to come and hold a social gathering here. Mr. Davies, they's aiming to hang you some."

We rolled the rain-barrels into the house, we toted bales of hay for barricades, and led our saddle-horses into cover; then put in the rest of our time filling the water-butts. In all we had forty minutes to

prepare for our guests, but wanted a whole lot more.

"You, Chalkeye," says young Monte in his thoughtful way, "you can talk the hind leg off a mule. Spose you make big war medicine to these here strangers until we're ready."

Custer had got joyful, as he always did when there was trouble coming, making little yelps of bliss.

"Don't talk them off the range," says he, "or we'll get no fight."

Ute, he lay low, saying nothing, but he sure grinned volumes while he whirled in with his axe, cutting twelve loopholes through the 'dobe walls. I told Custer to break a hole in the roof and get up there quick, because the parapet had rain-spouts most convenient for shooting. Monte was laying out the ammunition, I was spreading wet blankets over the hay barricade in the front doorway, and then the Vigilance Committee came slanting down for battle.

Seeing that Tombstone was shy of horseflesh that morning, these people had done their best with thirty head, using them to haul waggons and buckboards full of men. Only the chairman was in the saddle, he being old Mutiny Robertson, who wanted to buy my ranche and not to burn it. I ought to mention that this gentleman was a Cherokee Indian by birth, a white man by nature, and some time a robber himself. He knew what sort of lightning

had struck Tombstone during the night, but his feelings did him credit and kept his mouth shut. As chief of the Vigilantes he had to go against all his natural instincts, but still he acted hostile and looked dangerous, leading his men until he came up against my door.

"You, Chalkeye!" he shouted.

I put up my head behind the barricade in the doorway.

"Wall," says I, "this compliment, gentlemen, throws my tail high with pride. Put yo' hawsses in the barn while I fix the breakfast."

"These barricades," says Mutiny, "is intended hawspitable—eh, Chalkeye?"

"Which," says I, "they're raised in celebration of my thirty-third birthday as a token of innocent joy."

"Seems to me," he responds, "that this yere day is apt to be remembered hereaways as the anniversary of yo' quitting out from this mortal life."

"These predictions of yours," says I, "is rude."

"You're due to die some, right now"—he poked his gun. "Come out!"

"I remarks," says I, "on general principles that you all has come to mourn at the wrong funeral. My obsequies is postponed indefinite."

"Now, Chalkeye," says he, "it's no use arguing, so you want to come out like a man. We're full prepared to give you a decent turn-off, and a handsome funeral."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, gentlemen, but I has other engagements, and this is my busy day."

I listened to my boys getting ready. "Keep them amused," says Monte; "we need three more loopholes."

"If you don't come out," says Mutiny, "there's going to be trouble, 'cause we're gettin' tired."

"Wall, Mutiny, I'd shorely admire to know some trifling details first, 'cause you've aroused my interest in this yere celebration. Why for is my neck so much in need of stretching?"

"This yere is frivolous argument," says he; "we-all is here to hang you, not to waste time in debates."

"You has my sympathy," says I, "and I shares yo' poignant feelings about not wasting time. What's the use of a necktie social without an appropriate victim? Now thar's young Moses Bowles beside you —which I don't like the look of his neck, the same being much too short for a stand-off collar. What's the matter with hanging Moses Bowles?"

"Come out," says Mose, "or we'll burn your den, you horse-thief!"

"Bein' possessed of genius, Moses, you'll now proceed to set my 'dobe home in flames. The glare of yo' fierce eye is enough to burn brick walls."

A bullet whizzed past my ear, and I got mad.

"Ready!" yelled Monte. "Give the word, and we fire!"

"And now," says I, "you innocent pilgrims, you've given me heaps of time to get my twelve men ready. You've got three men in yo' posse who could hit a house from inside, the rest being as gun-shy as a school of girls. I've got a bullet-proof fort with the twelve best shots in Arizona, and if you don't get absent quick I'll splash yo' blood as high as the clouds. I give you two minutes to get out of range."

The weaker men began to rabbit, the best of them saw a whole row of loopholes with projecting guns, the leaders were holding a council of war.

"One minute!" says I, then turned to shout to my garrison. "Men on the roof, pick out the leaders to kill when I give the word! Men on the right, shoot all hawsses you can, or them reptiles is due to escape! Men on the left, attend to Mutiny! Ninety seconds! Ninety-five seconds!"

Half the Tombstone crowd was stampeding for the waggons, the rest were scared of getting left afoot.

"One hundred seconds!" Mutiny's counsellors were breaking for cover. "One hundred'n five! ten—ten more seconds——" Mutiny turned and bolted. "One—two—three—when I give the word—ready—Fire!"

We sprinkled the tails of the Stranglers until there was nothing to see but smoke and dust. Nobody stayed to get hurt.

My cousins the two Misses Jameson admit right free and candid that my past life is plumb deplorable, that my present example would corrupt the morals of a penitentiary, and that my future state is due to be disagreeable in a place too hot to be mentioned. They remark that my face is homely enough to scare cats, that my manners and customs are horrid, that my remarks are a whole lot inaccurate, and that most of my property is stolen goods. At the same time, they say that I'm nice, and there I agree with them. My face may not amount to being pretty, my virtues haven't reached the level of bigotry, but I feel in my bones that I'm a sure nice man. Being nice, I aim to be liked, I hunger for popularity, and that is just where I blame the Tombstone Stranglers. I've been misunderstood, I've not been appreciated, but why should I be taken out and lynched? It's plumb ridiculous!

Now I don't claim that I had any mission to reform the morals of the Vigilance Committee—which they have none—or to correct their views, the same being a whole lot steeped in error; neither would it be right for me to encourage them in the evil work of stretching my neck on a rope, or to lead them into the temptation of shooting me any more. When one gets disliked and discouraged by the hostile acts of mean people, one needs to have presence of mind and plenty absence of body. Wherefore I did right in rounding up all my livestock, and quitting a locality

where my peace of mind was disturbed with ropes, gunfire, and other evil communications. I took my riders and my herd away north, to where we could graze peaceful and virtuous amid the untroubled solitudes of the Superstitious Mountains.

There was work to do, a drive of a hundred and seventy miles with slow-moving stock, then scouting for water and feed on the new pasture, a permanent camp to make, and much besides which filled up four good weeks. Afterwards I tracked a mountain sheep up to the bare heights, where all the rock was glazed with lightning, and the desert lay below me. I sat on my tail to think, feeling lonesome then, looking east towards Texas and wondering if my poor old mother was still alive. Westward the sun was setting, and that way lay the great Pacific Ocean, bigger than all the plains, where the ship rode herd upon their droves of whales—I wanted to see that too. But then I looked south-east, the way I had come, through valleys of scrub and cactus; there, somewheres beyond the hills, was my little ranche, and all the good pasture away to Holy Cross. My heart was crying inside me, but I didn't know what I wanted until I thought of Curly. Sure enough I wanted her most of all.

Next morning I told all my boys good-bye, and streaked off to go see Curly. I rode till dusk and camped with Texas Bob, a friend of mine who told me I was sure enough idiot for getting outlawed.

Next evening I came to the house where my cousins lived, and crept in the dusk to scratch at their back door.

I found Miss Blossom Jameson all in a bustle as usual, which looked mighty natural. She was in the backyard feeding supper to her horse, and that poor victim leaned up against the fence to groan. There were cornstalks in it, cabbage-leaves, lettuce-leaves, tea-leaves, and some relics of ham and eggs.

"Now jest you sail right in, Mr. Hawss, and don't act wasteful, or you'll go without!"

Mr. Horse took a snuff at the mess, then backed away disgusted.

"Well, if that don' beat all! Now, you Hawss, you don't want to eat the flower-beds, or you'll get murdered!"

Mr. Horse turned his back and sulked.

"There! That's what I call a mean spirit, and I'm goin' to lock you up, you and your supper, till one of the two gets eaten—I don't care which!" So the lady chased Mr. Horse into the barn, and threw the pig-feed in after him. "I'll larn you to know what's good," says she, and slammed the door on his tail.

"Well!"—she stood with her back to the door, and threw up her nose at the sight of me—"I du wonder," says she, "that you dare to show yo' wicked face!"

I allowed that my good face was getting a bit mended since our last encounter. "How's my kid?" says I.

"Yo' savage, you mean. Now don't you say you've brought pet tigers this time, or tame dragons, 'cause I'll have no more strays at all."

"I've got a roan hawss here who's run a hundred miles since daybreak."

"Bring him in, then."

"He says he's a vegetarian, and cayn't eat ham and eggs."

"I don't care," says Miss Blossom; "we killed our pig to-day, and the slops has just got to be eaten. Waste is ruin."

"My hawss says he'll eat the slops, ma'am, if he can have a drink of whisky along with supper."

"Huh! so you want your vile debaucheries in spite of all I've told you against drink. Well, I 'spose you'll have it."

She ran off to fetch the liquor, which gave me time to bury her salad in the manure heap, and get a decent feed of cornstalks down from the loft. Then I used the whisky to rub down my weary horse, the same being medicine both for man and beast. I had some myself, while Miss Blossom stood by, talking of wicked waste, and how Curly had been neglected.

"Why, she's mo' like a man than a girl!"

"Spose, ma'am," says I, "that you'd been working

in a stable and got shot, then run into gaol, and pulled out through a hole in the wall, and doctored by a robber, and chased around the hills——"

"My habits are set," says Miss Blossom, "so I cayn't suppose any such thing. But that wig of Curly's, that skirt, those—now did yo' robber baron steal those things off a scarecrow, or did they grow by themselves?"

Then she grabbed my hands. "Thar," says she, "that's off my mind, so don't look worried. The dear little soul, she's the bravest, sweetest thing—and the way she bore all that pain! Why, you or any other man would have set around cursing all day and groaning all night, but Curly—why, she never even whimpered. Now I ask you, is it possible she shot those two men? I cayn't believe a word, so it's no use your talking."

"Was Miss Pansy very much scart with Curly's talk?"

"Miss Pansy, my good man, is a fool, although I say it. Of all the romantic nonsense and sentimental—but thar, she writes poetry, my dear, and that accounts for her. Why, if I hadn't locked her up in her room, that woman would have sent off a poem, all about lady outlaws, to the New York *Sunday Companion*. I burned the stuff, and she had to go off in hysterics. Shucks! She puts Curly off to sleep every night with her fool poems—and such trash! Now there she is, with her glue-glue harp

singing to Curly. If she don't beat cats! You listen."

Away off in the house I could hear Miss Pansy's thin little voice and glue-glue harp; I thought it sounded fine.

"Lost, stole, or strayed on Tuesday night,
The finder tries to hide it—
A woman's heart—he has no right,
For there's a Love inside it.

"The owner fears 'twas snatched away,
But this is a reminder,
That she is quite prepared to pay
One half, with thanks, to finder."

Miss Blossom led me to the house. "You come right into the settin'-room," says she, "and keep yo' tearing spurs off my new carpet."

I did my best about the spurs, but it would take an Indian scout to find a safe trail across that parlour floor, the same being cluttered up with little fool tables. These same tables were of different breeds, three-legged, two-legged, one-legged, tumble-over, all-to-pieces, trip-you-up, and smash-the-crockery, so it was a sure treat to watch Miss Pansy curving around without the slightest accident. Her paws were folded in front, her tail came swishing behind, her head came pecking along hen-fashion, and her smile was sweet enough to give me toothache.

"Oh," she bubbled, "I'm so glad you didn't get

lynched by those horrid men who never wash themselves, or think of serious things; and it's so nice to see you looking so brown with that beautiful cherry silk kerchief round yo' neck, and the wonderful leather leggings, and that dreadful revolver, so picturesque, so——"

"You're making a fool of yo'self," says Miss Blossom, "and the man wants feeding. Picturesque! Bosh! Shoo!" She chased Miss Pansy out of the room.

As to Curly, she lay on the sofa kicking high with joy. "Chalkeye," she howled, "you ole hoss-thief, keep yo' tearin' spurs off my new cyarpet. You picturesque, beautiful, leather-faced, cock-eyed robber! 'Ware tables, or they'll bite yo' laigs! Oh, gimme yo' paw to shake, and throw me a cigarette. Look out—that chair's goin' to buck!"

I sat on the edge of the chair, and grabbed her hand while she called me all sorts of pet names. Then it seems that Miss Pansy broke loose from Miss Blossom, and came surging back, for she heard the pet names, and shrieked—

"Oh! oh! Stop! What frightful language! Oh, please, if you're a lady—remember! Oh, Misteh Davies, you mustn't let her smoke!"

"Curly," says I, "you're shot, and you got to be good in a small voice, or——"

"Good," says Curly; "I'm a wolf. I come from Bitter Creek. The higher up, the worse the waters,

and I'm from the source, and it's my night to how-w-l. Yow-ow-ow!"

"Well," Miss Pansy shrieked, "I call it disgraceful, so there!"

"I don't care," says Curly. "I won't be good in a small voice, and I'll call this dear ole hoss-thief all the names I please. Why, Chalkeye and me punched cows at Holy Cross! Say, Chalkeye, d'you remember when I stuck burrs in under yo' saddle, and you got pitched to glory? Why, that's the very old hat I shot full of holes, and oh, I do enjoy to see you so much, you dear ole villain!"

Then Miss Blossom dragged Miss Pansy away to cook supper, and Curly settled down with her little paw in my fist.

"My habits," says she, "is a sure scandal, and I ain't got no more manners nor a bear. My language ain't becoming to a young gentlewoman, and my eating would disgrace a pinto hawss. They cayn't refawm me a lil' bit, and when I tries to set up on my tail, and look pretty, they tell me rebukes for crossin' my laigs like a cowboy. Oh, take me away, ole Chalkeye, take me away to the range and the camps, to feel the night-frosts agin, to sleep with the stars, to see the sun come up, to ride in the heat. This roof sets down on me at night. I cayn't see for walls; I cayn't get air to breathe. These ladies has roped me, and thrown me, tied down for branding, ears in the dust. Oh, take me away from this!"

"When that bandage is off yo' arm I'll take you, Curly."

"Not till then?"

She had scarcely strength yet to travel, and yet if she fretted like this at being shut up in a house, would she ever get well at all?

When I reflect what Curly looked like then it makes me wonder what sort of raging lunatic I had been to leave her in that house. By way of disguise she had a wig all sideways, and female clothes which she'd never learned to wear. They made her look like a man. Her skin had the desert tan; she moved and talked like a cowboy. But most of all, her eyes gave her dead away—the steel-blue eyes of a scout, more used to gun-fights than to needlework, which bored right through me. Only the frontiersman has eyes like that; only the outlaw has the haunted look which comes with slaying of men, and Curly was branded that way beyond mistake.

This poor child was wanted as McCalmont's son, hunted like a wild beast, with a price on her head for murder and for robbery under arms. And yet she was a woman!

"Say, Curly," I asked, "what has these ladies done to account for yo' being here in theyr home?"

She reached to a table, and gave me cuttings from the *Epitaph*. I fell to reading these:—

The burial of Buck Hennesy at La Soledad.

Dog-gone Hawkins' report of not finding robbers.

The rescue of McCalmont's prisoners out of the Jim Crow shaft, and the story of the posse which tracked the robbers north until the signs scattered out all over the country and every trace was lost.

The attempt of the Stranglers to lynch a horse-thief at Las Salinas, the same being me.

Then came a paragraph about a young lady staying at the home of the Misses Jameson.

> "We are informed that Miss Hilda Jameson, of Norfolk, Va., arrived last week on a visit to her aunts, the Misses Jameson. We regret to hear that on her journey westward this young lady met with an unfortunate accident, being severely bruised on the arm by the fall of a valise out of an upper bunk in the sleeping-car. This bruise has developed a formidable abscess, which the Misses Jameson are treating by the peculiar methods of Christian Science, of which craze they are well-known exponents. For our part we would suggest the calling in of a doctor; but as these ladies are way-up experts at nursing, we trust that their efforts will be successful, and that in a few days more we shall see the young lady around, enjoying all the pleasures of Tombstone society. In the meantime Miss Blossom Jameson wishes us to say that the patient needs absolute quiet, and friends are requested not to call at the house until further notice."

"As to the pleasures of Tombstone sassiety," says Curly, "I'm plumb fed up already. 'Spose they dream that I'll go back to shovelling manure in that stable?"

I asked her if there had been any visitors at the house.

"They came every day to inquire, and Miss Blossom insulted them regular in the front yard. Now they've quit."

"But nobody saw these ladies meeting a guest at the train."

"No, but you should hear Miss Blossom telling lies out thar in the yard! She's surely an artist."

"Curly," says I, "pull that wig straight, and hide up that scar on yo' brow. Cayn't you even pretend to act like a lady?"

"Like a woman, you mean."

"You're not safe—you'll be seen by some gossip through the window. You'd ought to hole up in the bedroom."

"And choke? I'd as lief get choked with a rope."

"Think of the risk!"

"I reckon a little excitement keeps me from feelin' dull. Now don't you look so solemn—with yo' eye like a poached aig, or I'll throw my wig at you-all. Say, Chalkeye, d'you cal'late the Lawd made them two old ladies vicious?"

"Why for?"

"Looks to me 'sif they was bawn broke in, and raised gentle, with lil' lace caps on they'r haids, and mittens on they'r pasterns. I been thinking fearful hard, tryin' to just imagine Miss Pansy bad; spose she was to kick, or strike, or rair up, or buck, or pitch,

or sunfish around to kill! And Miss Blossom, she only makes-believe to be dangerous to hide up her soft ole heart. Are real ladies all like that?"

"Well, usual they don't bite."

"I was raised wild"—Curly lay back tired—"my tribe are the young wolves, and I reckon when the Lawd was serving out goodness, He was sort of 'shamed lest we'd claim our share. He must be plumb busy, too, with His own people telling Him they'r prayers. Why, these two ladies requires whole heaps of attention. I allow theyr souls must have got out of order a lot, 'cause they has to put in enough supplications to save a whole cow camp entire. They're so plumb talkative that away that I cayn't get a prayer in edgeways."

She was getting tired and sleepy, so I sat quiet, watching. Then somebody came outside, hammering the front door, and I pulled my gun to be ready in case of trouble.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SAVING OF CURLY

MISS BLOSSOM was at the front door having great arguments with a man.

"If you got baby carriages to sell," says she, "I claim to be a spinster, and if it's lightning-rods, I don't hold with obstructing Providence. If it's insurance, or books, or pianolas, or dress patterns, or mowing machines, you'd better just go home. I'm proof against agents of all sorts, I'm not at home to visitors, and I don't feed tramps. Thar now, you just clear out."

"'Scuse me, ma'am, I——"

"No, you mayn't."

"Allow me to introduce——"

"No you don't. You come to the wrong house for that."

"Wall, I'm blessed if——"

"Yo're much more apt to get bit by my dawg, 'cause yo' breath smells of liquor, and I'm engaged."

"Glad to hear it, ma'am. I congratulate the happy gentleman you've chosen."

"Well, of all the impudence!"

"That's what my wife says—impudence. Will the dawg bite if I inquire for Misteh Curly McCalmont?"

My blood went to ice, and I reckon Miss Blossom collapsed a whole lot to judge by the bang where she lit.

"Wall, since yo're so kind, ma'am, I'll just step in."

I heard him step in.

"This way!" the lady was gasping for breath.

"The dining-room? Wall, now, this is shorely the purtiest room, and I do just admire to see sech flowers!"

Miss Blossom came cat-foot to shut the parlour door, and I heard no more.

Curly was changing the cartridges in her revolver, as she always did every evening.

"Scared?" she inquired, sort of sarcastic about the nose.

"Shut yo' haid. D'you want to be captured?"

"It would be a sort of relief from being so ladylike."

Then a big gust of laughter shook the house, and I knew that Miss Blossom's guest was the whitest man on the stock-range, Sheriff Bryant. Naturally I had to go and see old Dick, so I told Curly to keep good, quit the parlour, crossed the passage, and walked right into the dining-room, one hand on my gun and the other thrown up for peace.

Dick played up in the Indian sign talk: "Long time between drinks."

"Thirsty land," says my hand.

"Now may I inquire?" says Miss Blossom.

"Wall, ma'am"—old Dick cocked his grey eye sideways—"this Chalkeye person remarked that he languished for some whisky, upon which I rebuked him for projecting his drunken ambitions into a lady's presence."

The way he subdued Miss Blossom was plenty wondrous, for she lit out to find him the bottle.

"Sheriff," says I, as we shook hands, "yo' servant, seh."

"I left the sheriff part of me in my own pastures." Dick wrung my hand limp. "I don't aim to ride herd on the local criminals heah, so the hatchet is buried, and the chiefs get nose-paint. Miss Blossom, ma'am, we only aspire to drink to the toast of beauty." He filled up generous. "I look towards you, ma'am."

"I du despise a flatterer," says Miss Blossom, but I saw her blush.

"Wall, to resume," said Dick, "this lady's guest, Miss Hilda Jameson, of Norfolk, in old Virginie, is entitled to her own habits. She is wounded most unfortunate all day, but all night she's entitled to bulge around in a free country studying moonlight effects."

"She's due to be whipped," says Miss Blossom, mighty wrathful.

"On scenes of domestic bliss it is not my purpose, ma'am, to intrude. I only allude to the fact that this young lady was pervading Main Street late last night, happy and innocent, in a gale of wind, which it blew off her hat."

"Good gracious!"

"Yes, ma'am; and naturally the hat being pinned, her hair was blown off too."

"It blew off!"

"Perhaps, ma'am, this ha'r doesn't fit, and the best thing would be to shoot the party who made—the ornament. The young lady, of co'se, was in no way to blame if it flew down the street and she after it. I rise to observe that Deputy-Marshal Pedersen, being a modest man, was shocked most dreadful, and——"

"Oh! Oh!" Miss Blossom went white as the tablecloth.

"Go on," said I, "let's know the worst at once."

"And he couldn't stay to help the young lady, 'cause he was running to catch the midnight train."

"Thank goodness!"

"Yes, ma'am, he was due in Lordsburgh this mawning to collect a hoss-thief."

"And nobody else saw the wig?"

"No, ma'am, only Pedersen. He came whirling down on me this mawning at Lordsburgh with

dreams and visions about a robber chasing a wig, and a lady holed up in yo' home, and the same being disguised as a woman, but really a man, and wanting two thousand dollars daid or alive for the wig which its name was Curly. He seemed a heap confused and unreliable."

"This Pedersen man," says Miss Blossom, "is coming here to arrest *her*—I mean *him!* Oh, what's the use of talking! Speak, man! Speak!"

"Deputy-Marshal Pedersen, ma'am, is now in prison."

"Arrested!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Why, sheriff," says I, "what has he done to get arrested?"

"I dunno." Dick shook his grey head mournful. "I forget. I had to exceed my authority a whole lot, so the first thing I thought of was 'bigamy and confusion of mind.' I reckon I'll have to apologise, and he's a low-flung crawler to beg pardon to."

"You'll have to let him out?"

"I shorely will; meanwhile he's thinking of all his sins, and he certainly looks like a Mormon. He never combs his ha'r. But then, you see, I had to keep his paws off these honourable ladies until I could bring some sort of warning heah. Besides if this pusson with a wig is really pore Curly McCalmont, I feel that I done right."

"What makes you think that, Bryant?"

"Wall, I happen to know that them witnesses in the Ryan inquest here was bribed to swear away the life of old Balshannon's son. The hull blamed business stinks of perjury. I may be wrong, you one-eyed fraud, but when Curly punched cows with you at Holy Crawss I sort of hungered for him. You see, my missus and me couldn't compass a son of our own, and we just wanted Curly. When he quit out from you-all, we tried to catch him, but he broke away. Then came the big shooting-match, six weeks ago, and it broke my ole woman's heart. Thar was the lady gawn daid, and Balshannon quits out in the gun smoke, and you and the two youngsters outlawed for trying to save him. That's how I reads the signs on this big war-trail, and being only a crazy old plainsman, I takes the weaker side."

He reached out his paw.

"Put her thar, you one-eyed hoss-thief, and you'll know that there's one official in this hull corrupt and filthy outfit who cares for justice more'n he cares for law."

With warrants out against me on various charges, and the Tombstone Stranglers yearning to make me a corpse, I had come on this visit feeling plenty bashful, so it was good to have a genuine county sheriff acting chaperon. The ladies gave us a great sufficiency of supper, and then we made Curly swear faithful not to go hunting wigs in the moonlit streets.

Afterwards the ladies went to roost, and we two men, having tracked out to tend the horses, made down our beds in the barn loft.

Next morning my natural modesty, and certain remarks from the sheriff, made me hide up out of sight, but Bryant went to town and did my shopping. He bought me an iron-grey gelding, which I'd always longed to steal, because he was much too good for the tenderfoot doctor who owned him. It shocked my frugal mind to pay a hundred dollars cash, but Bryant was liberal with my money, and the horse was worth a hundred and fifty, anyhow. He got me a second-handed saddle, snaffle, rope, blanket, a dandy pair of shaps (leather armour for the legs), spurs, belt, shirt, overalls, boots, sombrero, and all cowboy fixings. If I was to take young Curly back to Robbers' Roost, she needed a proper trousseau, specially being due to meet Jim.

I hate to put up dull particulars, but I ought to mention that Mutiny Robertson had located a good showing of silver, the second east extension of the Contention Mine, on my land at Las Salinas. That is why for he put up six thousand dollars cash for my water-spring, fencing, and adobe house, getting clear title to the land which held his mineral rights. It grieves me to think of Mutiny grabbing all his present wealth because I couldn't hold down that place without being lynched. Such is the fruits of getting unpopular, and I might preach a plenty

improving sermon on the uncertainties of business, the immorality of being found out, the depravity of things in general, the cussedness of fate. Mutiny waited sly, while I plunged around conspicuous, so now he's rich, setting a good example, while I'm as poor as a fox.

What with my bank deposit and the sale of my home, Dick brought me back nine thousand dollars (£1,800) in cash. Likewise I had in my warbags the money which McCalmont had trusted to my care for Curly's dowry. I gave Dick charge of all this wealth, taking only a thousand dollars for present expenses, and stuffed the same in the treasure-belt which I carry next my skin. These proceedings were a comfort to me, for I'm here to remark, and ready to back my statements with money, arguments, or guns, that the handling of wealth is more encouraging to the heart than such lonesome games as the pursuit of virtue.

Besides the plunder and Curly's trousseau, Dick brought me chocolate creams, a new breed of rim-fire cigars just strong enough to buck, a quart of pickles, and some medicine for our thirst. The old drunkard knows what is good, and before supper we sat in the barn with these comforts talking business.

It needs such surroundings of luxury to get my thoughts down to any manner of business, for I hold that office work is adapted to town sharps only, and

not to men. Bryant and I had the misfortune to be named in Lord Balshannon's will as his executors, to ride herd on his Jim until such time as the colt could run alone. In this business my co-robber had taken action already, annexing the trainload of breeding cattle which had been stolen by Jabez Y. Stone. These cattle were sold by auction, and Dick held the money, swearing that nobody else but Jim should get so much as a smell.

With regard to Holy Cross, Dick, as sheriff, had seized the old hacienda, and the same must be sold to pay Balshannon's debts to the Ryan estate. It seems that Michael Ryan claimed this plunder, and that Jim, the natural heir, had stolen Michael. "Thar it stands," says Dick, who has a legal mind, "until Jim skins his meat."

That set me thinking of Michael. He was not likely to be special fat after his ride with the robbers.

"I doubt," says Bryant, "that so shorely as Jim does the skinning, that Ryan duck ain't got a tail feather left."

With these remarks he slanted away back to town, having agreed to sup with the City Marshal. As for me, I lay in the corn-shucks full of dim wonderings about that Pedersen person cramped in the cooler at Lordsburgh on Bryant's charge of "bigamy and confusion of mind." The question was, would he stay put? The arrangement made with Pedersen was only temporary, not permanent like a proper funeral.

Moreover, in his place I should have felt mournful and ill used. I should have put up objections and struggles to find my way out. Suppose this person escaped, or got loosed by his lawyer, or sent Curly's address to the Tombstone police? I was afflicted with doubts about said Pedersen, and my mind began to gloat on the joys of absence. So I saddled the horses, got ready for the warpath, and watching until it was dark enough, made a break for the back door of the house, carrying Curly's outfit.

To judge by the clatter in the house, something had happened, and when I broke in on the ladies, I found them having hysterics over their copy of the *Epitaph*. I slung the cowboy gear to Curly, and bade her change herself quick because we must hit the trail. On that the clatter got to a crisis, as it does at a hen-roost in the case of fox. Miss Blossom called me all the names she could think of; Miss Pansy sobbed at having to part with her little private robber; Miss Curly whirled in telling the news in the paper. All of them wanted to talk, so I surely played fox to that hen-roost, chasing Miss Pansy out to pack us a lunch for the trail, grabbing the paper from Curly, and scaring Miss Blossom with bad words until she got tame enough to attend to business. She took Curly into the bedroom, and there was a sort of lull, while I got my ears to work at the back door.

It's a true fact that I have a sort of sense which

warns me if danger is coming. It makes my hands tingle as if they were full of prickles, and my heart beats loud, so I can scarcely hear. That minute I stood at the back door felt like whole hours of waiting, so that I wanted to howl. Close by me in the kitchen Miss Pansy was sobbing about the bad words she had heard, and through the mosquito netting I could hear Miss Blossom oppressing Curly while she changed her clothes. I folded the newspaper and jammed it into my hind pocket, studied the lay of the stable door to see how quick I could get the horses out, and pulled my gun loose for war.

Away towards the town I could hear the rumble of wheels within half a mile, coming on rapid.

"Miss Pansy!" I called.

She quit crying.

"This Curly's in danger," says I. "Brace up; act brave, and when this waggon stops at the door, meet the men who try to break in. Tell them you're not to home, and give 'em some Christian Science."

She went quite cool to wait by the front door, and now I could see the dust of a waggon come up against the afterglow in the sky.

"Miss Blossom," I called, "roll Curly out through that window just as she is. Quick!"

"Oh, but——"

"Curly," I shouted, "come out!"

"Coming!"

"Fix that bed, Miss Blossom; lay in with Curly's wig, and prepare to play daid!"

Curly came tumbling through the mosquito bar in the window, dropped on her feet like a cat. "Horses!" I whispered, and she ran, her spurs clattering outrageous along the gravel-path.

The waggon had pulled up to the front gate, somebody shouted, I heard Miss Pansy screeching like a cougar, and a man came surging past the side of the house, lifting his gun to draw a bead on Curly as she ran. I jumped behind, felled him with my gun-butt, and bolted.

What with Miss Pansy's shrieks, and the shouting of men, the clatter had got to be a whole disturbance, rousing a quiet neighbourhood. As I ran I could hear Miss Blossom calling, "Go 'way, you rude men! Scat!"

It seemed to me that time was worth a million dollars a second while I held the back gate by the stable, and Curly rode through with the horses straight on to the open range. As I swung to the saddle, I heard the house door battered in with a crash of breaking glass.

"Hold on," said Curly, reining in her horse, "I was forgettin'."

The searchers were swarming through the house, and for my part I was full content to depart without telling them any good-bye.

"SHOT BOTH HORSES DOWN"

"You're scart," said Curly. "You coward! You stay heah!"

Then feeling for blood with her spurs, she sailed at full gallop along the outer side of the garden fence. At the first shot from the yard she ducked, throwing herself until she hung Indian fashion along the off side of her horse. A bullet trimmed my back hair as I followed, gun flames blazed from the back porch and the windows, as we shot past the house. The bullets were singing all round us, our horses were crazy with fright, but then we swung round the end of the garden fence, running full tilt against the standing team of horses which the police had left in the road. The shock stampeded them, but Curly swerved clear of their rush, rolled back into the saddle, raced abreast, and shot both horses down. A minute more, and the firing died away behind us, for we were racing neck-and-neck across the desert. Curly had left the police to follow afoot, but now she began to weaken, for, because she had played the man, she broke down and sobbed—a woman.

We had been running maybe two hours when we pulled up on the top of a hill to rest our horses. Far down to southward the electric lights in the city made a silver haze of small specks glistening as though a scrap of sky had fallen there. High in the south Orion rode guard upon the star herds, and the night was so still that we were scared to speak.

I wanted to smoke, but on a night like that the striking of a match may be seen for miles around, so I took a bite at my plug and ate tobacco instead. Then as Curly and I sat on a rock together listening, I heard a bear cough because his nose got dusty, grubbing for ants; a coyote was singing the hunger-song, and miles away to the east a ranche dog answered him. Then Curly's horse scrunched up a tuft of grass, and my beast pawing, startled a rattlesnake. The little woman beside me whispered then—

"Shorely the Lawd makes His big medicine for us, for snakes and robbers, wolves and b'ars. Only the folk down thar cayn't see Him, 'cause they got electric lights instead of stars."

"Which them two pore ladies," says I, "gets gun-flame by way of lamps to cheer them up to-night."

"I hate to think how we-all stirred theyr peace. Still, Bryant has stroked theyr fur by now," she sighed. "Them visitors rumpled me too, and all my brussles is pointing the wrong way still."

"D'you reckon, Curly," I asked, "that the City Marshal is hoping to trail us by starlight?"

"Not to hurt," she yawned, "'cept maybe he's got smell-dogs guidin' his posse. Yes, I remember a while back the Marshal bought a team of blood-hounds."

She didn't seem to take much interest, so I proposed that we roll our tails.

"I see his lantern," said Curly; "thar it is agin. We got a ten-mile start."

I saw the glimmer then. "Come on," said I.

"*Poco tiempo*," says Curly. "I'm fearful sorry for them pore ladies yondeh."

I dragged her away, and we rode on, throwing the miles astern. Every two hours or so Curly would give the horses a rest and a taste of grass—a trick she had learned from Indians, which kept them fresh for a trail.

The night was cold, with a little "lazy wind," as Curly called it, too tired to go round, so it went right through us. Just before dawn we crossed a clay flat holding a slough of mud, and found it hard with frost.

"When water goes to sleep with cold," says Curly, "a smell-dog's nose ain't goin' to guide his laigs. This frost is due to send the posse home."

"At dawn they'll see our tracks."

Dawn broke, and we were rising a slope of sand-drift, with acres of naked rock ahead of us.

"Haw!" said Curly, leading me to the left until we entered the rock field. "Gee," she called, and we crossed the rocks to the right. "Follow the rocks—shy wide of any sand." I followed for a mile, until a little hill shut off the route we had come by. "Dismount," she said, and I stepped down by the edge of the sands. She made me take the saddle blankets, the oilskin coats, and a serape (Mexican blanket), and

make a pathway of them across the sand, on which she rode, leading my horse, while I renewed the track in front of her for a couple of hundred feet. So we left horse sign on the sand which looked a whole fortnight old. Then, gathering the clothes, I mounted, and we curved away among sandhills for half an hour, sailing along at a lope until we came to a patch of gramma grass. "Let the hawsses graze," said Curly, and sat side-saddle, resting while she smoked a cigarette. I did the same, and the tracks we left now were those of grazing horses, not those of travellers. Then I resaddled, and all set, we rode off again to the north. The frost had spoiled our scent; the blanket play and grazing play had sure discouraged trackers.

"Curly," says I, "you heap big Injun!"

"I lil' small robber," she answered, "givin' away trade secrets."

A few miles northward we circled up beyond a ridge of hills to a good look-out point. From there we could see the Marshal's posse small as ants in the distance, raging around on the rock flat, from whence they presently crawled off south, looking a lot subdued. Then I unsaddled, while Curly killed out a few centipedes, scorpions, rattlers, and other local vermin, to make our sleep all comfy under the rocks.

At noon, when the heat awoke us, we rode on to Texas Bob's big spring, reaching his camp by sun-

down. There we made up for lost meals by taking in four at once. Mrs. Bob gave us jerked beef, spiced bread and coffee; her wild range kids rubbed down our horses, watered them and fed; the old gentleman himself poured in his best advice until Curly crept off to sleep. As for me, I felt good, sitting there in the hut of cactus sticks watching the gold grass slowly change to grey, and great big stars come out above the hills.

The long hair lay like silver around the old man's shoulders; the white beard, pointed short, wagged over his deerskin shirt; his kind eyes wrinkled with fun, and all his words were wisdom absolute. I reckon he's the wisest man in all the southern desert, and when I told him the things I ought not to have done, he showed me better how to act in future.

"Stealin' a womern," says he, "is different from stealin' hawsses. You can make the hawsses forget theyr home range in a month, but a womern will sure break fences to quit back to the man she wants. This Curly will run to her mate, and whar they graze there ain't room for you in the pasture. The good Book says: 'No man shall put them asunder,' and the rules of Right and Wrong ain't got exceptions. Don't you try to steal Curly."

In all my life I never needed a friend so much as I did that night, but when Curly and I hit the trail the old scout reached me his hand

"Put her right thar, Chalkeye," says he; "it's

mighty hard at times to stick to the rules of the game. It's so easy to go crooked that it takes a man to play straight—and you'll play straight. *Adios!*"

All night my mind was at ease, and when day broke again we were into the Superstitious Mountains. So I led Curly down towards Echo Spring, and gave the long yell to my boys where they lay in camp.

CHAPTER XXV

A MILLION DOLLARS RANSOM

IN giving my own account of this unpleasantness which happened between the Du Chesnay and Ryan families I've just grabbed Truth by the tail and tried to stay right with her. But Truth runs swift, and raises plenty dust of lies around her heels, so, maybe, whirling along I missed good facts. Happens I've been poorly provided with one eye and a lot of prejudice to see the trail ahead; likely I've not been the only party interested. Anyways, outsiders could watch the stampede without getting choked with dust.

Now these conclusions struck me abrupt like a bat in the eye when I sat down to rest in camp at Echo Spring. Before leaving Tombstone, while thinking of other worries, I had caught a copy of a local paper, stuffed the same in my rear pocket, and disremembered having such possessions. I never thought of it until my tigers, hungering for news, caught sight of the bulging paper and rushed my camp to grab. Then I unfolded the *Epitaph* to these boys, all setting around on their tails and pointing

their ears for instruction. I read to them about a certain Chalkeye Davies, who seemed to be a most astonishing outrageous villain, performing simultaneous crimes in several places at once. My tigers purred for more.

Then came a whole page of revelations concerning "the kidnapped Crœsus," otherwise styled "the stolen millionaire" and the "brigands' prey." It was clearly proved that the Chalkeye villain, Jim du Chesnay—described as "a broken-down swell"—and Captain McCalmont had joined together in purloining Michael Ryan and hiding him up in a cave, the place being well known to the authorities. This cave was inaccessible by land and water, guarded with machine-guns, and supplied with all modern conveniences, especially searchlights. "Our special representative" had been there, "but declined to give particulars for fear of driving the bandits to still more desperate measures."

Then came the *Epitaph* gallery of fine old portraits. We knew them all well, because they were served up frequent to represent murderers, politicians, actresses, preachers, scandalous British duchesses, and other notorious persons. Now they represented McCalmont, Curly, Chalkeye, Jim, Michael Ryan, Mrs. Michael, and old Mrs. Ryan. The *Epitaph* said it was wishful with these identifications to assist the ends of justice.

After this the next page was all quotations from leading papers throughout the Republic, proving how

plumb depraved the robbers were, how wicked it was to purloin the rich and good out of their private cars, and how the Federal Government ought to act in this shocking catastrophe. The New York papers just burned themselves with wrath because Michael's present engagements prevented him a whole lot from attending to railroad business. His financial combine was due to collapse complete unless he took hold at once.

Last came "our special supplement," with the very latest news. It seems that Michael had written to his wife in New York; likewise that somebody stole the letter from her and sold it to the New York *Megaphone.* Then all the papers copied Michael's letter and laid the blame on the *Megaphone.* Here is the letter:—

"*September 8th*, 1900.

"DEAR KATHLEEN,

"On 28th ult. I was abducted at Tombstone out of my car by brigands and carried blindfold, lashed on to the back of a horse, for several hundred miles through frightful country, arriving here 4th instant. When I got here I only weighed ninety-eight pounds! Indeed I was nearly dead; but now the robbers are feeding me up, so that I'm gaining flesh, although I'm still kept prisoner in close confinement.

"I don't know the whereabouts of this house, but it's a large ranche building of logs in the middle of pine woods. At nights I'm almost frozen, so it must be high up in some range of mountains. The country looks flat from the window. A robber told me once that the place is in California.

"Now, dearest, you will take this as my authority, and raise the sum of one million dollars to pay my ransom, and save me from being murdered. You know who to go to, and offer securities for the loan, getting the best terms you can. This money must be paid one-tenth in U.S. gold currency, and the balance in notes of ($50) fifty dollars and under. Bring it to Flagstaff, in Arizona, and ask for military escort. There you will charter a waggon, and have the treasure delivered at the point where the Tuba trail from Flagstaff crosses the Little Colorado River, right in the middle of the Painted Desert. The waggon must then be abandoned, and the escort to withdraw to Cañon Diablo, leaving no spies behind. The chief of the robbers tells me that the man he sends with a team to get this waggon will be a perfectly innocent farmer, and that any parties attempting to molest, join, or follow him will be killed so quick they'll never know what struck them.

"I must earnestly warn you, as you value my life, to prevent any attempt whatever to watch or track the waggon; or prior to my release to permit any hostile movement against the robbers; or to deliver any money short of the full ransom; or to mark any coin or note for future identification. If the terms are not absolutely complied with in every detail, within forty days from date—that is, by noon of 18th October, I shall be murdered. If the ransom is delivered as per instructions by 18th October and found correct, the robbers will then disperse, and have no further use for me. They promise then to deliver me at the nearest ranche or farm on or before 1st November.

"*Private.*—Now, dearest, of my own free will, and

without compulsion from the robbers, I want to ease my mind of a great burden, by confessing to you as I shall to Holy Church if ever I get the chance. Under this dreadful visitation I see things in their true light which before were hid.

"I guess there's not the slightest doubt that Lord Balshannon was one of the blackest scoundrels that ever disgraced this earth. Apart from his odious crimes in Ireland, his later life was steeped in villainy. For years at Holy Cross ranche he was in open league with this gang of robbers who have captured me. One of them, Chalkeye Davies, the notorious horse-thief, was his foreman, and Captain McCalmont's son went there to get educated in crime. Once Balshannon actually hired the gang to rob my father of $75,000.

"Under such circumstances I am awed by the sublime courage of my father in this single-handed war against Balshannon and his outlaws. I stood at father's side in the last fight when Balshannon murdered him; I fired first in the fusillade which avenged the old man's death; and untrained as I am to such wild warfare of the Frontier, I tried to be worthy of my blood.

"But when I think of Balshannon's son, I realise now that he fought for his father as I fought for mine. Afterwards, blinded with passion, I brought a charge against him, and swore that he alone was guilty of my father's death. I had no right to do that; the young chap was innocent, the charge was a put-up job. But the evil one must have possessed me entirely, for when several witnesses thought they could please me by swearing Jim's life away, I was a party to their perjuries. More, I was induced to

help them with money to leave the country, and so escape arrest.

"If I sinned, I am punished, for as the robbers were Balshannon's partners, so they took sides with his son. Because I attacked the lad they abducted me. That is my punishment, Kathleen, and it is just.

"In one thing I am puzzled, because I expected to find Balshannon's son with the robbers. I have not seen him, and McCalmont swears that Jim du Chesnay took no part in this outrage.

"Kathleen, we've got to do right in this business. I want the charge against James du Chesnay withdrawn right now. When I am free I shall give him back his home and lands, all that father seized, and ask him to forget that there was ever a quarrel between our families.

"Dear love, it breaks my heart to think of your anxiety. As for my business interests, I dare not think of what may be involved by my long absence. Mavourneen, you must save me quick, or worse will happen yet.

"Your distracted lover,

"MICHAEL."

It made me sorry to think of that poor devil. You see, he tended strict to business first, then strutted awhile to show himself off to his woman, before he unfolded his crooked little soul in the part marked "Private." His letter gave me plenty to think about.

Still, I had my own concerns to worry me, for Monte took me round our herd, which had grown in

surprising ways during my absence. The mares, it seemed, had gotten more prolific than usual, giving birth to full-grown horses, ready branded. On the whole I concluded that if any of the neighbours happened around, my boys would find that pasture unhealthy with symptoms of lead poisoning. I advised them to quit, so they agreed to drift the herd along eastward, and sell out in Texas. Meanwhile, I cut out Curly's buckskin mare, and a few of my own pet runners who knew how to show their tails to any pursuers. We took twelve good stayers from the herd, and a little wall-eyed pack mule who had fallen dead in love with Curly's mare. So Curly and I were ready for our march.

As to that young person, from the moment she hit the trail out of Tombstone the wound in her arm healed rapid, and she sure forgot to be an invalid. Two days we fed and rested her, but then she began to act warlike, oppressing me for sloth. On the third morning I loaded the pack mule, told the boys good-bye, and trailed off with Curly, pointing for Robbers' Roost.

When water won't cure thirst, but the juice in your mouth turns to slime caking in lumps on your lips, when the skin dries up because there's no more sweat, when your eyes ache and your brain mills round—that's Arizona. The air shakes in waves like a mist of cobwebs, and through that quiver the landscape goes all skeweye, for some of the mountains

float up clear of the land, and some turn upside down standing on rows of pillars along the skyline. Then the hollows of the land fill with blue mist—blue lakes and cactus bushes change into waving palm trees by the waterside. How can a man keep his head when the world goes raving crazy all round him? You have to just keep on remembering that your eyes have quit being responsible, that your nose is a liar, that your ears are fooled, then keep a taut rein on yourself for fear your wits stampede, and your legs go chasing visions down the trail to death.

That valley of Central Arizona got me plumb bewildered: a country of bare earth and mesquite brush like mist, with huge big trees of cactus standing in one grove a hundred miles across. Then came a hillside of black cinders lifting a hundred miles; but the top was a level mesa, surely the first place I ever seen with good grass under pine trees. I had never seen woods before, and this coconino forest is the sort of pasture I'd want to go to after this present life. I hunger none for golden pavements or any desert lay-out, nor am I wishful for a harp—having a taste for guitars—nor for flopping around on wings, nor a crown of glory—the same being ostentatious a whole lot. Pasture like this, a horse, a camp, a spring—such promises as them would lure me to being good.

Right in the heart of this forest there's a bunch of dead volcanoes called the San Francisco peaks, lifting

their frosty heads into the sky, and round the skirts of lava at their feet lies broken country. Curly showed good judgment in making camps, but hereabouts I thought she had lost her wits, for she led me over broken lava flows, heart-breaking ground for the horses, where we had to dismount and climb. Then all of a sudden we dropped down, hid from all the world, into a meadow walled around with lava. This tract had escaped when the rest was overflowed; so happened there was grass among the bull pines, and right at the head of the field a little cave with space of floor for camping beside a bubbling spring. We struck the place at noon and camped, my partner concluding to lie over until she could make a night scout in search of news. She slept through the afternoon while I stood guard outside.

Up to that time we had been scared to make a fire at night or show a smoke by day, except for the minutes we needed boiling coffee. Besides that, we could never camp within ten miles of a water-hole, but had to ride on after drinking to win the nearest grass, this country being all ate up around the pools. Here we had grass and water, the cave to hide our fire, and certainty besides of not being caught without warning. It was mighty fine to set around the fire after supper.

"You Chalkeye"—Curly lit up a cigarette and broke a silence which had lasted days—"what does it feel like, being safe?"

"We're safe enough here, lil' partner."

"Till I hit the trail for this scouting. But I mean, to live safe day after day without nobody even wanting to kill you. Ain't it some monotonous?"

"Not to hurt."

"It must feel sort of—neglected. I read a book onced about folks in England, which I kep' on readin' and readin' to see if anythin' happened 'cept meals and go-to-bed and get-up-in-the-mawning. The girl was a sure enough fool, and as to the boy—well, he wore government socks, and didn't love the Lawd. Then he mar'ied a widow by mistake, which she had a forked tongue, a bad eye, and parted her ha'r on one side lookin' rather cute. That boy just aimed to cut his throat for seventy-three pages, then didn't after all, which was plumb discouraging. 'Stead of that he got a government job inspectin' the clouds and drawin' salary. Then the widdy she talked herself to death, and quit out. Afterwards that boy took sixty-one pages to get a kiss from the heroine. Thar was a deanery in it and a funny parrot—I reckon that's all the story."

"They mar'ied?"

"Sure, and nothin' happened ever afterwards, 'cept kids. Them characters was awful safe from gettin' excited. Will it be that a-way when I get tame enough to mar'y Jim?"

Feeling that said Jim was a lot unworthy of her, I strayed out to study how much our camp was

visible. It seemed like we couldn't be attacked without our visitors cussing around first in the lava. They'd bark their shins, and we'd hear gentle protests.

When I came back, Curly was brooding still about her Jim.

"He'll be a dook like the ole patrone," says she, "and sure as I'm a lady I'll be tired of life. Robes goes with that job, and a golden crown such as the angels wear."

"I reckon that's only for Sunday best," I told her.

"To go to church? Wall, now, ain't that jest fine? And how my wolves would laugh to see!" She stood up swaggering before the fire, her hand on her revolver, her laugh ringing echoes round the cave. "Jest you think," says she, "of me—a lady! Footman at the church door to announce us 'Lord and Lady Balshannon!' and Jim and me goes buttin' along to our pew. Then the preacher he rears up to talk his sermon. 'My lord, my lady, and you common or'nary brethren.' Cayn't you see Jim spit on his crown and give it a rub with his sleeve, and me snarled up in my robe like a roped hawss? Then we ride off home to the castle, and Jim says, 'Beshrew thee! go to, thou varlet, and wrastle the grub pile 'fore I shoot the cook!' Then the varlet says there's a deputy-marshal come to arrest us both for stealin' cows, so Jim has him hung in the moat. Afterwards we put in the hull afternoon shootin' foxes, and other

British sports until it's time for supper, then play stud poker beside the parlour stove. You're to come and stop with us, Chalkeye."

"Sing to me, Curly," says I, because her voice was sweet enough to gentle a grizzly bear, and it always smoothed my fur. It seems to me I can see her now, her eyes green and flame in the firelight, her face—I can't describe her face.

"Here's a moccasin track in the drifts,
It's no more than the length of me hand,
An' her instep—just see how it lifts—
If that ain't jest the best in the land!
For the maid ran as free as the wind,
And her foot was as light as the snow,
Why, as sure as I follow, I'll find
Me a kiss whar her red blushes grow.

"Here's two small little feet and a skirt,
Here's a soft little heart all aglow;
See me trail down the dear little flirt
By the sign which she left in the snow!
Did she run? 'Twas a hint to make haste,
An' why, bless her!—I'm sure she won't mind!
If she's got any kisses to waste,
Why, she knew that a man was behind!

"Did she run 'cause she's only afraid?
No, for sure 'twas to set me the pace!
And I've fallen in love with a maid
When I ain't had a sight of her face.
There she is! And I knew she was near;
Will she pay me a kiss to be free?
Will she hate? will she love? will she fear?
Why, the darling! she's waiting to see!"

In all the thousands of camp fires dotted along the trail of my life, that one is best to think of. Surely I believe that the Big Spirit sent us poor little spirits loose on the earth to be kicked and educated, not to have nice times. Looking round at present facts, we see how Life is a cold, hard, business proposition, so we have to keep a mighty sharp look-out for fear of being kicked off the premises. The future glows with hope gay as a sunrise, the past is full of memories shining glorious like the setting sun. Seems to me that in Eternity, when the cold present is mixed up with all the rainbow colours of Past and Future—why, then I'll hear Curly's voice come soft through the pines, and see her face in the fire where I camp.

So in my poor way I dream in this lone camp where I sit at present. Perhaps, says you, I'd better wake up right now and tend to my story.

At midnight Curly rode into the town of Flagstaff. Afterwards, following the Grand Cañon trail at daybreak, she happened by accident on a stage-coach broken down with a load of tourists. The driver chanced to be a retired robber, gone tame with rheumatism, so she helped him to fix his linch pin which had snapped. As to the tourists, they were plumb content to find a "real live cowboy" who would talk to them. Most punchers steer shy of tourists, but Curly enjoyed them. She was always curious as a young antelope at anything unusual in

the way of game, so she borrowed all their newspapers "to read to her dying mother"—which was me. Then she told them good advice about keeping alert at night to watch for robbers. On that the teamster cheered them up by divulging how robbers drink human blood to keep their courage boiling, and how they like a baby when they are staled on pork. Curly imparted a few particulars and rode away with a high tail.

I was still asleep when she came whirling into camp, whooping for breakfast ravenous.

"Show a laig," says she, "and set out the grub pile swift while I go wrangle the hawsses. We get a move on ourselves right after breakfast!"

There was something unusual, I thought, about the way she talked, a sort of high-strung excitement. As to her face, that was pale as ashes. By the time I'd cooked bacon and slapjacks she had the horses in, and fresh mounts saddled.

"How's Flagstaff?" I asked, while she washed herself at the spring.

"Ain't this just purty?" she said to the bubbling water. "Flagstaff? Why, it sure is the craziest town I ever seen." Her laugh was harsh to hear.

"You been showing yo' face in the street?"

"Wall partly, but I covered up half my complexion to look like toothache—so!" She stuffed a ball of handkerchief into her near cheek, bound the towel around her jaw, and looked most miserable. "Oh,

throw me a dentist!" she howled, then broke out laughing. "I shorely did act pitiful."

"And why for is this town locoed?" I felt the girl was laughing so as not to cry.

"Well," says she, "there's Joe Beef, the Utah sheriff, and a lot of lil' no-account sheriffs, there's a fat United States Marshal with a chin whisker and a heap of deputies, there's cowboys, scouts, and trackers, reporters, ambulances, dawgs, pony-soldiers——"

"Has the Navajos broke out?"

"No, the pale-face tribe has broke out; it's a hull epidemic, and there's an outfit on the war trail in Utah, another on the San Juan in Colorado—and they're going to eat up Robbers' Roost—and you, Chalkeye, lookin' glum as a new-laid widow! Scat, you!"

"Has they gawn mad?" I asked. "The moment they make a break for Robbers' Roost, McCalmont will kill this Ryan, scatter his wolves, and vanish. This must be only the escort for Ryan's ransom."

"It's plumb ridiculous, but—there ain't no ransom."

"Yo're dreaming, Curly. This projeck of troops is sure death to Ryan. They'd risk the killin' of a common or'nary man—but a millionaire!"

"That's where the joke comes—he ain't a millionaire!"

I saw her quit her breakfast all untasted.

"Cayn't you be serious, child, for once?" I asked, but it made me ache to see her face that way.

"I daren't be serious, I daren't think, I daren't. Just you look at them papers."

I snatched at the nearest paper, opened it, and thought I must have got locoed. These were the headlines :—

"Ryan Combine Smashed. Collapse of the Trust."—"Panic on 'Change. The Kidnapped Millionaire, a Confessed Perjurer and Corrupter of Witnesses, admits that He swore away the Life of an Innocent Man."—"Behold thy Financial Gods, O Israel!"

I read on, dazed with the news. "Public Confidence at an End."—"Investors jump from Under."—"Ryan Debentures a Frost."—"Shares thrown on the Ash-heap."—"Petition in Bankruptcy."—"Mrs. Ryan abandons all Hope of a Ransom."—"Federal Government pledged to wipe out the Bandits."—"Movements of Troops."—Sheriff Joe Beef interviewed on the Situation."—"Forces taking the Field."—"One of the Robbers offers Himself as a Guide."

Curly was pulling my sleeve. "Come here," she said, and there was surely something awful in her voice. "Look, see that dragon-fly," she whispered, "and all them flowers usin' the spring for a mirror, bendin' low. And hear the bull pines whisper, smell the great strong scent, look thar at the blue sky, and the cloud herds grazin'. That's like my home, ole Chalkeye—sech sounds, sech good smells, sech woods, and sech a heaven overhead. The boys air gentlin' hawsses in the big corral, or ridin' out to get

a deer for supper. My fatheh sets in the doorway strummin' hymns on his old guitar, his dawgs around him, his lil' small cat pawin' around to help. And Jim is thar, my Jim—cayn't I be serious? Don't I think? Ain't I seein' that, all blackened ruins—bloody ground—daid corpses rotting down by the corrals—shadows of black wings acrost the yard? Oh, God of Mercy, spare 'em, spare my wolves, my home, my fatheh! And Jim is thar!"

She turned against me raging. "What air you waiting for? Has you jest got to stand around all day? Yo're scart—that's what's the matter with you-all—afraid to even carry a warning! What d'ye want to pack the kitchen for? I'm shut of you. Stay thar!"

She jumped to her horse, she sprang to the saddle, she lashed her spurs for blood, and whirled away to the northward.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE STRONGHOLD

MY words are only crawling for lack of wings; my brain's like ashes when it needs to be live fire. I have no brains or words to talk of what I've seen, and I reckon I'm a lot incompetent. The men who wrote the Bible ought to be turned loose on this earth again to make another book. Then folks who have not seen might understand such places as the Painted Desert, the Rock City, and the Grand Cañon of the Colorado.

What with delays in packing and driving I had to track Curly for maybe thirty miles before I caught her up at Clay Flat by the edge of the forest. Her horse was dead, and she sat beside him, her stone-white face set cold, staring straight ahead. Below us lay the Painted Desert, so wide that the further edge was lost in mist. We rode down to the trickle of water at the bottom, then up the further side, and all the rock lay in belts red as flame, yellow as gold, purple as violets, which seemed to shine of their own light, burning us. The men who stop in that country mostly go mad, the which is natural. Beyond we

came out on a mesa of naked rock and sand-drifts, where we found a pool between high cliffs, splashed through it, and maybe a dozen miles beyond found after nightfall a few plants of grass. We had covered a hundred and ten miles at a tearing pace that day, changing horses, robber fashion, at every halt we made.

Next morning we met up with small bunches of Navajo Indians, a strange breed of people, dressed up in their private brown skins, with great plenty of turquoise necklace, silver harness, and a wisp of breech clout, riding with bows and arrows to hunt rabbits. They handed a few arrows after us; but their ponies could not run, so we quit their company.

Then we came to the City of Rocks, flaming red, and high as mountains; their thousand-foot walls sheer to the desert, all carved in needle spires, towers, castles, palaces. The street was six miles wide, I reckon, and we rode along it maybe fifty miles, like crawling flies in the sand.

Beyond the city we curved around by a gap in the desert, a sort of crack half a mile deep, with a river along the bottom. It swung about like a snake, getting deeper and deeper; but we kept to the level desert, until we reached a little side cañon, where there was feed and water. We resaddled there, taking Curly's buckskin and my pet horse Sam. The rest of our bunch we turned down into that pasture, and left them, riding on along the rim rock.

Just after sundown we came abrupt to what looked like the end of the world, a gulf so deep that we couldn't see to the bottom. That mighty gash in the earth is six hundred miles in length, it's usually ten miles wide; it's more than a sheer mile deep, and full of mountain ranges all shaped like gigantic buildings. Dead weary as I was from riding more than two hundred miles in forty-eight hours, I forgot about being tired when I saw that place, the most tremendous thing in the whole earth, the Grand Cañon of Colorado.

There was no rest for us, but seven miles of such a break-neck trail as I'd never imagined possible, for it overhung black death from start to finish, looping round the face of outrageous cliffs which seemed to have no bottom. Midnight was past before we got to camp beside the river, flung off the harness, turned the horses loose, and dropped in our tracks to sleep.

A gunshot roused me, and starting broad awake I heard the echoes crashing from wall to wall.

"It's only me," said Curly, "signalling."

Dark banks of fog were driving over our heads, and I shivered with the dawn cold. Then I looked up, and more than a mile in the air saw scarlet cliffs ablaze in the sunlight. The river rolled beside our camp, wide as the Thames in London, grey water so thick that splashes of it harden into mud. A gunshot answered from the further bank, then Curly

gave the cougar war-howl. The yelp of a wolf came back.

"Both boats," said Curly, "are on this side of the river—something gawn wrong. Cook breakfast while I cross."

She took a little crazy boat and towed it upstream, scrambling over boulders a quarter-mile or so. From there she pulled the boat across the great grey sluice, fetching the other bank after a half-mile drift downstream. There was a strong backwater along that further bank, and she pulled easy, drifting past the camp up to a rocky headland. The man who had answered the signals was waiting there to throw his saddle into the boat, and follow, leading two horses so they could swim behind. By the time they crossed again I had our two horses to camp, and breakfast waiting.

It was not until after he fed, and he laid in provisions generous, that this robber—his name was Pieface—had a word to say. He took no more notice of me than if I was dead, and when he talked with Curly he sat close beside her whispering. I heard nothing; but allow I thought a heap, for this man's face was bad, the very look of him was poison. My gun was plenty ready while I watched.

"Chalkeye," says Curly out aloud, but her eyes were set on this ladrone all the while. "This Pieface says that ten of our boys were sent down to wait for

the ransom. They were camped at Clay Flat, you remember?"

"I ain't much forgetful," says I, for this meant that all the cowards had deserted! We had seen no men at Clay Flat.

"The chief," says Curly, "is right up on his ear, and sends this Pieface to find out what's wrong at Clay Flat."

When this Pieface person had hit the trail, we took both boats across the river and swam our horses. From the far bank our way turned sharp to the left into the side cañon of Dirty Devil Creek. There we rode along some miles in the water, so as to leave no trail; then, quitting the bottom, turned sharp back up a ledge, threading the face of the cliffs. The heat was blinding; it seemed as if we were being baked alive, and even my tanned hide broke out in blisters. Curly allowed this cliff was over six thousand feet high, and the trail kept circling round red buttresses, flanks of broken rock, to one sheer cape where nothing lay below us but blue space. Then we swung into a little arroyo with trickling water, shady trees, and a gentle glade until we reached to the summit. At the rim rock a robber halted us, until Curly pushed her hat-brim up, showing her face. She answered for me, and we rode on through level pine woods. I noticed horse tracks scattering everywhere, but no trail whatever; and then even the horse-tracks petered out. I looked

back, and there was not a sign to show the way we had come. For the first mile we headed towards where the sun would set, now we swung round on a long curve until we pointed north-east. I might just as well have been blindfold.

"Curly," I asked, "is this Main Street?"

"I reckon," she laughed. "Could you find the way back?"

Once before she had told me that no trails led to the stronghold.

Then away to the left I saw a big corral, with a dust of horses inside, and men sitting round on the top rail, maybe a dozen of them. Beyond it lay a streak of open water, and right in front loomed a house, set in the standing woods, where one could hardly see a hundred paces. It was a ranche house of the usual breed, log-built, low-pitched, banked up around with earth as high as the loopholes, and at each end against the gable stood a dry stone chimney. Two or three men sat at the doorway smoking, and but for the fact that they packed their guns when at home, they looked like the usual cowboys. The dogs were plenty exuberant, but Curly might have been out shooting rabbits for all the fuss that these men made at her coming.

We unsaddled and set our horses loose.

"Wall, Curly," asked one of the robbers, "got any liquor along?"

"Nary a smell."

Then McCalmont came round the end of the house, dusty after some argument with a broncho, trailing his rope while he coiled it.

"So, home at last," says he, shaking a paw with me right hearty. "Wall, I'm sure pleased at you, Curly."

"Come to repawt," says Curly, mighty cool, but I saw that her eyes were ranging around for Jim. An *olla* of water hung from the eave by the door, and McCalmont passed the dipper to me first. Then while Curly drank he introduced me to Crazy Hoss, Black Stanley, and his brother Dave, who made out they were glad to see me, though their looks said different.

Then the Captain asked me in, and we followed Curly through the mess-house door. The log walls were hung with antlers, skins lay on the floor before the big hearth at the end, and down the middle, with benches on either side, ran the long table with its oilcloth cover, the tinware set out for supper, and netting to keep off flies. That cow camp looked good to me, home-like and soothing. Off to the left of the messroom opened a little lean-to house—McCalmont's den—with a cubby hole beyond it for Curly. We found her sitting on the bunk, gun and spurs unbuckled, and holding her legs out for the old man to pull off her shaps. I unharnessed myself, and he fed me a cigar, bidding me settle in a cowhide chair. I felt right to home then.

"Dad," says Curly abrupt, "whar's my Jim?"

"What, you ain't met him?" says McCalmont. "He's gawn to look for you."

Curly went pale under the tan, and gulped. "How long?" she asked.

"Oh, quite a time. Why, child, what's scart you? Perhaps he's with my boys at Painted Desert."

"Daddy, I've brought bad news."

"I reckon"—McCalmont spoke very low—"I been thar before a few times, and yet we've worried along. Lie down, so you'll get mo' rest."

He sat on the edge of the bunk, his hand on hers, as she lay loosing out bit by bit the story of the ransom lost, the Federal Government on the warpath, ten good men deserted. He was all crouched up when she finished, the stub of a cigarette burning his fingers, and he looked very old.

I went to get the newspapers which I'd kept in my warbags for him, and when I came back he turned loose a volley of questions, searching me to the bones until he had all the truth.

"Well, well," he said at last, with a queer smile, "these yere official parties seem to be takin' quite an interest, eh? I thank you, seh, and I'm full satisfied." Then he stood up. "You must be kinder hungry, Misteh Davies. Spose you jest interview my cook. I think that you and him has met before, and won't need introducin'. My son and I will join you presently."

I strayed out through the messroom and found the kitchen beyond. Sure enough the cook and I were acquainted, although I had not calculated to see this particular person in shirt and overalls, and his bare arms white with flour. He was plenty absorbed too, dipping balls of chopped meat into a pan full of mess.

"How air you, seh?"

He shied right off his feet and turned to face me, looking as guilty as a caught fox.

"I guessed as much," he gasped; "all blackguards are bound to flock together here."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Ryan," says I.

Then he collected himself for war. "State your business, and get right out of here. I'm engaged!"

"I'm engaged likewise"—I sat down on a box, and a dog came fawning to me—"wharas this dog is polite, and sets an example. He's plumb full of decorum and depawtment."

I hardly know what possessed me. Ryan's looks perhaps, or the way he guarded those meat balls. I grabbed the nearest, and fed it to the dog so quick that Ryan had only time enough to give himself dead away.

"Leave that dawg alone!" says I. He quit resisting me then, backed to the log wall, and stood glaring.

"I've noticed," says I, "in dawgs that the smaller the dawg, the larger the bark. I knew one onced so

small that he hadn't room to hold his bark—and the recoil tharfrom threw him back three dawg lengths. You seem to suffer a whole lot from yo' recoil, Mr. Ryan."

"I guess," he said in his harsh Yankee twang, "that you're a low-down coward—torturing me because you know I'm helpless."

"That dawg," says I, "is acting sort of queer, eh? As to my being a coward, Mr. Ryan, you'll remember the last time we met I came buttin' along to yo' hotel in Tombstone commenting on yo' proceedings with a straight tongue, and guns to back the same."

"Come to the point," says he.

"Now this yere is what I'm trailin's up to, seh, that I bears neither guns nor malice, calls no names, bridles my tongue severe, treats you with plenty respect, and gently inquires, whar do you keep yo' manners?"

"Where you keep your honesty," says he, sort of sarcastic. "You know I can't escape, so I've got to listen. Talk, my good man, and when you're through you can go."

The town scout still had his office manners, a lot contemptuous. He climbed up on top of his vanity—like a frog on a ladder—to call me "my good man." And yet I had him tamed enough for business.

"I take notice," says I, "that on the shelf above yo' haid there's a tin of rough-on-rats. This condiment is maybe unusual in meat balls, and it seems to affect yo' dawg some poignant, with wiggles and

froth on the jaws. He's swelling up too. I likewise remarks that thar's enough of these high-flavoured meat balls to go through McCalmont and all his riders. May I politely ask how long you been cook for this ranche?"

"Mind your own business."

"Which is to further test these same delicacies by trying a meat ball on you."

He grabbed a long butcher-knife from the table.

"Try it," says he.

"Maybe I'd better call in Captain McCalmont. Shall I shout for him?"

Ryan dropped the knife.

"What do you want to know?"

"How long have you been cook?"

"Since yesterday. I've been helping a man named Pieface."

"Why did he quit?"

"Got a note by carrier pigeon. He was in charge of McCalmont's pigeons."

"You found the note after he left?"

"Yes."

"Hand it over."

He said bad words.

"I notice," says I, "that the meat ball has finished with yo' dawg."

He took a slip of paper from his hind-pocket.

"No ransom," I read. "Warn the boys."

"Were the boys warned?"

"HE GRABBED A LONG BUTCHER-KNIFE FROM THE TABLE.
'TRY IT,' SAYS HE"

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"No."

"The news made you sort of desperate?"

"They'll kill me when they know!"

"So you took precautions first?"

"Why do you torture me?"

"Prefer a meat-ball?"

"Go on, sir."

"I might be induced to hide away these delicacies. Also this"—I kicked the dog's carcase—"in fact to help you some. You could bury the past, and resign yo' post as cook."

"The news will come out, and I'll be murdered anyway. What's the good?"

"There being no ransom," says I, "the use for you here ain't much conspicuous. As a cook you're precarious, too. Suppose I got you turned loose?"

"I'll pay one hundred thousand dollars the day you set me free in the nearest town."

How could I tell the poor brute that he had not a dollar left in the whole world?

"Two hundred thousand," says he, "and that's my last word."

A man came to the door behind me, which opened on the yard. There hung a long iron crowbar, bent up in the form of a triangle. The man began to beat this with a horseshoe, and the sound would carry maybe a quarter-mile.

"Name your own terms," says Ryan. "Come, name your price!"

"You does me too much honour," says I, for how could I tell him the facts?

"What do I care for your honour?" Ryan had played like a sneaking coyote before, but now he talked out like a man. "I've bought better men than you with a hundred dollars, and now I'm going to insult you in hard cash. Your price, you thief!"

The sound of the gong must have been a gathering signal, for men were straying in from the corrals, and there was soon a trampling of feet and buzz of talk from the messroom at my back.

"D'ye think," says Ryan, "that I'd be under any obligation to such as you? I ask no favours. I only try to make it worth your while to do what's right for once. Come, have you got any manhood in you? I appeal to your manhood to save me. Oh, turn your back, you hound!"

I ran to my saddle in the yard, opened my warbags, grabbed out a pad of paper and fountain-pen, then pushed my way through the growing crowd about the messroom doors, until I won back to the kitchen.

"Ryan," says I, "set down on that meat-block, and write down what I say in yo' own words."

"What new treachery is this?" he asked.

"If you want to live," I answered, "you'd best get a move on, and write."

The row in the messroom made it hard for him to hear, so I drew up close.

"Memorandum," says I, and he began to scribble; "date it 'Robbers' Roost, Utah.'"

"But this is California!"

"Write what I say, 'October 13th, 1900.'"

Michael Ryan confessed on oath how he had aided and abetted George Ryan in a plot to destroy Balshannon. He confessed to perjury at the Ryan inquest, naming the witnesses and the amounts he paid to each. He released the Holy Cross estate from all claims on the ground of debt, restoring the same to Jim. He swore that Jim, Curly, and I were not among the brigands who captured him, and he believed all three of us to be innocent.

As to these last facts, I had to convince him with a meat ball, but in the end he signed.

Then I got in a brace of independent robbers to sign as witnesses, so the thing looked mighty legal and satisfying. Meanwhile in the messroom I could hear McCalmont calling his wolves to order, and my witnesses went away to hear his talk.

"Ryan," says I, sitting down beside him, "you know the points of the compass?"

"I guess."

"I'm going to explain the trail to the nearest settlement; see here." So I began to scribble out a map showing the lie of the Cañons, the route to where we had left the boats, the signs to guide him beyond. "When you see this big butte towering high on the right——" I looked up, and found he

was not listening, for he pointed his ears to the mess-room where McCalmont talked.

"Yo're due to understand," the Captain was saying, "that this yere Ryan made a letter which he sent to his wife. He showed me the letter, and it was sure fine scholarship, telling her plain and clear how to scare up his ransom at once, how to deliver the same, and not make crooked plays to get us trapped. Mrs. Ryan she got the letter all right, but then some low-lived swab stole it away from her, and sold it to the N' York *Megaphone*."

Ryan let out a sudden cry.

"That's what's the matter," says McCalmont, "and all the private part of the letter got into print; whar Ryan confesses how he acted foul to pore young Jim du Chesnay. He confesses to perjury and bribing witnesses, an' such-like acts of rotten treachery, which the general public havin' entrusted millions of money to this Ryan to hold and invest the same, ain't pleased when they larns his private manners and customs, or how his manhood proves itself up when tested. The public thinks it's been too trustful in confiding big wealth to a felon who is due to be gaoled for his sins and gathered into the penitentiary."

"Escape," says I to Ryan, "or you ain't got five minutes to live."

"Escape!" says he—"to penitentiary! Oh, Kath-

leen, Kathleen!" He covered his face with his hands, while McCalmont went on—

"So you see, boys, that the public closes down on this Ryan, and grabs theyr money, and jumps from under sudden, stampeding before the crash. This pore swab we got in the kitchen, which he cayn't even cook, ain't a millionaire any mo', but a bankrupt, due to get five years' grief for his acts, which is plumb felonious."

It seemed as if all the robbers were stunned with the news, for they made no move or sound. Only poor Ryan groaned, and I felt sick, because I knew it was too late for him even to run.

"Boys," says McCalmont, "this news is bad medicine for we-all, 'cause we done attracted too much attention, we made ourselves plenty conspicuous, and the United States has awoke to a smell of robbers. The nation has got a move on at last, and it's coming up agin us on every side to put our fires out. Ten of our men has deserted, and likewise the Pieface animal, so there'll be plenty guides to lead the attack on this place. I reckon our trails are blocked, our water-holes are held, our time is pretty near expired in this world. I tharfore propose that we divide up what plunder we got in store—the same being considerable—and all share alike, and after that we scatter as best we can. Those of us who win out of this trap is due to live, and those who don't will get a sure good fight."

I heard a voice call out, "Who brung this news?"

"The man who risked his life to bring this news is my friend Chalkeye Davies."

At that I whirled right in through the crowd in the messroom, and won to McCalmont's side.

"I got to speak," says I.

The Captain grabbed my hand. "Boys, will you hear him?" he called.

"Spit it out!" says Crazy Hoss. "Yo're a sure enough man, and we'll hear."

"Boys," says I, "if you hold it good to have this warning in time to save yo' lives, I has to say that Curly McCalmont done it. He acted faithful when ten men and a swab deserted you complete, and Curly is shorely braver than any man I ever seen in this world. I speaks for Curly and me, and for the Captain, when I says that it's a hull lot pitiful to see the way this Ryan person has acted straight to own up the wrong he done, and played his cyards honest in the matter of ransom. We asks you to spare the life of this yere Ryan."

Crazy Hoss reared up swift to open war against me.

"I'll spare him!" he shouted. "I'll spare him a gunload of lead! What's yo' game, stranger? Show down yo' hand, and let's see this hull crooked lay-out. I stood at the loophole thar to watch yo' play, I seen you workin' over this yere prisoner until he's plumb subdued, and offerin' bribes. You

catch him with a can full of wolf-bait pizen, preparin' the same for our supper; you feed his meat ball to his dawg, which dies on the floor between you; you threatens to stuff another down Ryan's throat; then you makes him good talk till he signs a paper, and now you arises here to recite his virtues, playin' to save his life. Show down yo' game!"

By this time I was facing a matter of twenty revolvers, all a-quiver to drive holes through my poor old hide. Some yelled that Ryan had bribed me, some that I was projecting the death of the whole gang by Ryan's poison.

I threw up my hand, showing the peace sign quick.

"After you!" I called, always willing to oblige —"after you. Shoot first, and hear me afterwards, eh? That's right, boys. You see, I pack no gun, 'cause I'm yo' guest."

The guns were put away.

"You've heard," says I, "from Misteh Crazy Hoss how I subdued this Ryan and got a quittance for Jim du Chesnay from the charge of murder. I'm his guardian, boys. Furthermore, you heard from Misteh Crazy Hoss a plumb truthful account of how I saved this whole crowd from having wolf-bait fed to us for our supper—the same being considered unwholesome. Now, as to this pore little felon, he put up the only play he knew to save hisself from

being murdered. He ain't a lion to fight with teeth, or a man to distribute gunfire on his enemies; but his back's to the wall and he puts up the best little fight he knows about. He, bein' a sure snake, uses poison, whereat, having drawn his fangs, I takes his side, and begs the critter's life. I want to have him for a curio to put in my collection, and I offers ten cents for the same—which is more'n he's worth."

"Boys," said McCalmont, "if this yere Chalkeye didn't allus take the weaker side, he'd be a rich man still, instead of an outlaw herdin' with our gang as his last refuge."

The robbers seemed to like me some better now, and a feeling of popularity began to glow on my skin.

"But," says McCalmont, "in the matter of this yere snake, he acts plumb erroneous. If the snake escapes to give evidence, he can identify the entire gang, Chalkeye included. Go—kill that snake!"

Crazy Hoss rushed to the kitchen. "Gawn!" he yelled. "Escaped! So this is yo' game, Mr. Chalkeye!"

"Kill him! kill him!"

"Halt!" McCalmont faced the rush against me—outroared the shouting. "Back, or I fire! Back, you curs! Deal with this business afterwards—we want the snake first! Whar's them smell-dawgs? Here, Powder! Powder! Here, you Rip; come on,

lil' dawg! Crazy Hoss, you put on them dawgs to the scent, track down this Ryan, and kill him. Then come back."

The dogs were put on Ryan's trail. "Go, get 'im, Rip! Sick 'im, Powder! Tear 'im and eat 'im! Come along, boys!" So the whole crowd poured away to track Ryan.

McCalmont grabbed me by the arm to hold me back.

"You fool," he hissed through his teeth, "come on—there's not a moment to lose—or them wolves will get you! Curly! Curly, come out, you, and fetch Chalkeye's gun. Chalkeye, you come quick."

Curly came running from the little hind room with our guns, while McCalmont rushed me to the kitchen. "Here," he said, "hold this sack for grub!"

"Not them meat balls," says I; "meat balls is out of season."

"All right," he laughed, pitching a half-sack of flour into the bag which I held, then a side of bacon, and such other truck as was handy. "Curly, you knows whar to take this man?"

"Come along," says Curly. And I followed tame, with the sack on my shoulder until we gained the woods.

"Back!" says Curly sudden, and dodged for cover, while I dropped flat behind a fallen tree. Looking from under, I saw Ryan come surging past in front

of us, screeching like all possessed, the smell-dogs at his tail, and the robbers swarming close behind.

"A near thing that," says Curly, when they had passed; "creep through under the log."

I crept through with my sack, and she followed.

"Lie low," she said; "we're hidden here from the ranche until we can run some more. Get out yo' gun."

They say that we white men, using our right hands mostly, is strongest on that side, and apt to bear to the left when we don't take note how we run. Anyway, Ryan, instead of circling south, had circled to the left and lost himself, then, when he found he was hunted, went off his head complete. He was back in the yard now, close beside the house, where McCalmont headed him off with a shot from the door, while the robbers spread out half circling. They laughed and shouted.

"My turn first!" says Crazy Hoss.

"Take his off ear, Crazy!"

The shot took Ryan's right ear; then Spotty fired, lopping off the left. The poor brute tried to bolt, but a bullet swung him around. He lifted his hands for mercy, but the next shot smashed his wrist. He screamed, and a bullet caught his teeth. Curly was yelling now, but nobody noticed, for Ryan was down on his knees, and his face was being ripped to pieces. Then I saw McCalmont fire, and one of his dogs dropped dead. He fired again, and

killed the other hound. He had saved me from being tracked.

"Quit firing!" he shouted, and the robbers threatened him. "Now," he yelled at them, "who wants to talk war agin my friend Davies and me?"

"Come away," says Curly; and I crept after her.

A man's legs are naturally forked to fit onto a horse, and mine have never been broke to walking afoot. Fact is my legs act resentful when I walk, making me waddle all the same as a duck; which it humbles me to think of, because that Curly person loaded a sack on my withers, and herded me along like a pack mule until I felt no better than a spavined, groaning wreck. We must have gone afoot more than two whole miles before we came out at last on the edge of the Grand Cañon.

At this place, right in under the rim rock, there was a hidden cavern—a fine big place when you got down there, but a scary climb to reach. Half-way down the rock ladder I grabbed a root, which turned out to be a young rattlesnake, and was so surprised that I pretty near took flight. Curly saved me that time from being an angel—which leads me to remark that there's lots of people better adapted to that holy vocation than me.

It was dark when we got to the cavern, but next morning I saw that it was a sure fine hiding-place, the floor being covered with a whole village of old stone houses. There are thousands of cliff villages

like this in the cañon country, made by some breed of Indians long gone dead, but this one had special conveniences, because you could spit from the outer wall into sheer eternity. Seeing how the robbers were warped in their judgments of me, and the authorities likewise prejudiced, my health required plenty seclusion then. We stayed in that hole for a week.

Curly was restive, quitting me at night to range the woods and visit the ranche, collecting everything useful which was small enough and loose enough to pull. She got four horses into a hidden pasture, with saddles for the same, and chuck to feed us when we should hit the trail. The plunder was good, but the news she brought smelt bad of coming trouble, for the robbers stayed to quarrel over their shares of past thievings. When they broke to scatter, the trails were all blocked with troops, and then they were herded back into the ranche. On the fourth day I had to make Curly prisoner, while from noon to dusk the battle raged at the stronghold, and she wanted to go and die at her father's side. All that night and the day that followed I kept the poor girl quiet with my gun, then when the darkness came I let her free.

I don't like to think of what happened next, because I reckon that if I wash my outside I ought likewise to keep my inside clean and tidy with nice thoughts. Getting our horses, Curly and I rode back

to Robbers' Roost, pulling up at the edge of the clearing just as the new moon lifted above the pines. The stench of death, black ruins, white ashes, dark patches where blood had dried upon the dust, everywhere broken corpses—coyotes creeping to cover, eagles flapping heavily away—my soul felt small and humble in that place. Black it was and silver under the moon, with something moving slow from corpse to corpse in search—a live man counting the dead. Something in the way he moved reminded me I must have known that man, but the little partner called to him all at once—

"Jim!" Her voice went low and clear across the silence. "Jim!"

CHAPTER XXVII

A SECOND-HAND ANGEL

SCOUTING cautious, and shying wide of settlements except when we had to buy chuck, I herded my youngsters up the long trail north. We took no count of the distance, we lost all tab of dates, but camped where game was plenty, pushed on when the sun was shining, holed up when the wind was too cold, and mostly lived by hunting. So we rode the winter through and came to the spring beyond, catching maybe more happiness than was good to have all at once.

One day, the snow being gone, and the prairie one big garden of spring flowers reaching away to the skyline, we happened to meet up sudden with a pony-soldier which he was lying under the shadow of his horse and playing tunes on a mouth-organ, heaps content with himself. His coat was red, his harness all glittering fine, his boots were shiny, his spurs had small cruel rowels. He said his chief was His Imperial Majesty Edward VII., that his tribe was the North-West Mounted Police, and his camp was called Medicine Hat, the same being close adjacent.

We sounded him on robbers, but he seemed plumb ignorant, and said there was quite a few antelope if we cared for hunting.

Telling the youngsters to camp, I went butting along into Medicine Hat to prospect the same alone. It felt mighty strange to be in a town again, see the people walking around who belonged there, women and children especially, but the whisky I sampled felt right natural, and for all my snuffing and snorting I smelt nothing suspicious in the way of wolf-trap. So I traded with a lady who kept store for woman's clothing, such as she used herself, enough to load up my pack-horse. She certainly selected liberal to judge by the money I paid.

When I got back to camp expecting supper, I found the kids had been quarrelling, so that they weren't on speaking terms, and I had to introduce them. Jim was special haughty, but Curly got heaps interested in the clothes I'd bought, crowing and chuckling over everything. Her favourite game was playing at being a lady, but now she shied at committing herself.

"Shucks!" she flirted across to the far side of the fire. "I cayn't oppress Jim in them things—I'd get so tame and weak he'd sit on my haid!"

"You're due to get mar'ied," says I, "as sure as sunrise to-morrow."

"So! Jim ain't caught me yet!"

Jim started in to catch her, but she jumped the fire to clear him.

"Now!" she defied him complete; "don't you rush my corral with one of yo' fool kisses, or I'll shorely bat yo' haid. I ain't laid down my arms yet!"

So she swaggered with her little brown hand on her gun, the firelight glowing on her leather clothes and gold bright hair, on the flush of her sunburnt skin, on milk-white teeth, and laughing, flashing eyes. Jim's heart was burning, I reckon, for he went down on one knee and reached out his arms to her. There was only the fire between them.

"Say you love me, Curly?"

"It cayn't be helped, Jim," she whispered, and her face went grave, "but I do shorely love you."

. . . . .

Riding the ranges of the world and grazing in life's pastures, I've got to be plumb content with things present, which I can grab the same with my teeth, instead of hungering after that heaven above which seems a lot uncertain, and apt to prove disappointing. Here I've got horses for sure, plenty cows, and Monte, one of my old riders, for my partner. Bear Hole is the name of our new ranche, with the bull pines of the coconino forest all around us, the hoary old volcanoes towering above, and the lava-beds fencing our home pasture. Back of the

cabin is the spring where Curly used to splash me when she washed, the cave where she sang to me beside our camp fire. The bubble spring, the wind in the pines, the chatter of the birds, and the meadow flowers remind me of her always. She has put away her spurs and gun never to ride any more with free men on God's grass, because, poor soul! she's only a lady now and gone respectable.

Last summer—it sure makes me sweat to think of that scary business—I went to Ireland. First came civilisation—which I'd never seen it before—cities all cluttered up with so various noises and smells that I got lost complete. When you stop to study the trail you get killed by a tramcar. Then there was the ocean, a sure great sight and exciting to the stomach—mine got plumb dissolute, pitching and bucking around like a mean horse, so that I was heaps glad to dismount at Liverpool. That Old Country is plenty strange, too, for a plain man to consider, for I seen women drunk and children starving, and had to bat a white man's head for shining a nigger's shoes. It beats me how such a tribe can ride herd on a bunch of empires as easy as I drive cows, but if I proceed to unfold all I don't know, I'll be apt to get plumb talkative.

When I came up against Balshannon Castle, I found it a sure enough palace, which was no place for me, so I pawed around outside inquiring. Her ladyship was to home, and I found her setting in

a fold-up chair on the terrace. It made me feel uplifted to see her there nursing a small baby, crooning fool talk to the same, which she patted and smacked and nuzzled all at once.

"Wall," says she, as I came looming up accidental, "ef it ain't ole Chalkeye! Didn't I tell you awdehs to come long ago? Now don't you talk, or you'll spoil my kid's morals, 'cause he ain't broke to hawss-thieves. Yes, you may set on that stool."

"Curly," says I, feeling scared, "is that yo' kid?"

"Sort of. I traded for him. He's a second-hand angel. Now jest ain't he cute?"

He was a sure cunning little person, and thought me great medicine to play with.

"Whar is his lawdship?" says I.

"Jim's down to the pasture, breaking a fool colt, and Chalkeye—oh, you ole felon, how I enjoy to see yo' homely face! I got good news. Father's alive, yes, in New York. He writes to say he's got a job at a theatre, giving shows of roping and shooting. He's the Cowboy Champion, and"—her voice dropped to a whisper—"planning enormous robberies. He'll steal New York, I reckon."

"Curly," says I, "spose I give you good news. May I hold that kid just to try?"

"Now you tame yo'self, and don't get ra'ring up too proud. Then maybe you shall—to-morrow. Tell me yo' news."

I handed her the documents, which the governor

of Arizona had made for me himself. Curly was pardoned, the charge against Jim was withdrawn, and I was to come up for trial when called upon. I shall not be called upon so long as I stay good.

I saw the tears in Curly's eyes as she read, and her lips went twisty as if she were due to cry.

"Shorely," she said, "this comes of tellin' our prayers to God. So Jim and me is free to go back to Holy Crawss?"

"You're free."

"Old friend," she whispered, "you must be first to tell Jim. Leave me awhile."

I walked away into the house as if to look for Jim, then crept back behind a curtain watching her. She looked away to the west, and I knew she was longing for the desert. Then she kissed her baby on the nose, and once again, as in the old days, I heard her singing:—

"Whar y'u from, little stranger—little boy?
Y'u was riding a cloud on that star-strewn plain,
But y'u fell from the skies like a drop of rain,
To this wo'ld of sorrow and long, long pain—
Will y'u care fo' yo' motheh, little boy?"

Far off I could hear the footfall of a horse.

"When y'u grow, little varmint, lillie boy,
Y'u'll be ridin' a hawss at yo' fatheh's side,
With yo' gun and yo' spurs and yo' haidstrong pride:
Will y'u think of yo' home when the world rolls wide—
Will y'u wish fo' yo' motheh, lillie boy?"

The horse was coming nearer up the drive.

"When y'u love in yo' manhood, little boy,
When y'u dream of a girl who is angel fair,
When the stars are her eyes, and the winds her hair,
When the sun is her smile, and yo' heaven's thar,
Will y'u care fo' yo' motheh, lillie boy?"

The horseman, brought up half-rearing, stepped from the saddle, then threw his rein in the old range way, and Balshannon hurried to his wife.

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